

THE
CHRISTIAN MONITOR.
—
NO. V.
—
CONTAINING
A SERIOUS CALL
TO A
DEVOUT AND HOLY LIFE.

CHRISTIAN MEDITATION

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DEVOULT AND HOPE IN THE

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PREFATORY REMARKS.

For the fifth number of the Christian Monitor, we have abridged "A serious call to a devout and holy life, adapted to the state and condition of all orders of christians, by William Law, A. M."

The original work has had the rare fortune to interest the generality of readers, while it has gained the high approbation of the most learned.

In proof of the former assertion, we may allege the great number of editions, through which it has passed. As evidence of the latter, it is necessary only to mention the commendation it has received from Dr. Samuel Johnson. "When at Oxford," says he, "I took up Law's Serious Call to a holy life, expecting to find it a dull book, (as such books generally are,) and perhaps to laugh at it. But I found Law quite an overmatch for me ; and this was the first occasion of my thinking in earnest of religion, after I became capable of rational inquiry."*

* Vide Boswell's life of Johnson, third edition, vol. I. p. 42.

In another place it is remarked, "He much commended Law's Serious Call, which he said was the finest piece of hortatory theology in any language."*

Even the historian Gibbon, who was himself an infidel, is forced to give the following honourable testimony† to the merits of this work. "Mr. Law's master-piece, the Serious Call, is still read as a popular and powerful book of devotion. His precepts are rigid ; but they are formed and derived from the gospel. His satire is sharp ; but his wisdom is from the knowledge of human life ; and many of his portraits are not unworthy the pen of La Bruyere. If there yet exists a spark of piety in his reader's mind, he will soon kindle it to a flame."

No further apology can be necessary for attempting to excite attention to such a work ; especially when it is considered, that it is but little known in this part of our country, and that not one copy of it was to be found at any bookstore in Boston.

More important is it to give an account of the manner, in which the abridgment has been conducted.

* Boswell's life of Johnson, vol. II. p. 118.

† In his memoirs.

As, in order to furnish a number, the work was to be reduced to about one quarter of its original dimensions, it became much more difficult to determine what to omit, than what to extract.

We have endeavoured to select such parts, as are best adapted to general edification. Some whole chapters are omitted. Others are new modelled. Many characters, which are drawn with a masterly hand, it was necessary to reject ; because they do not apply to the state of society in this country. Others are retained with but few exceptions.

As the style of the author did not need, it has received no material alterations.

May that gracious providence, without whose smiles all human endeavours are vain, prosper this work, and make it instrumental in exciting the attention of many by serious consideration to a devout and holy life !

... alegorii literare na bozice
sakre su odlično potražiti u svim
četiri razdoblja, ali je neizostavno da se u svim
četiri razdoblja na literaturu uveže i u
sakre, a u svim četiri razdoblja uveže i u sakre.

CHAP. I.

On the nature and extent of christian devotion.

DEVOTION signifies a life given or devoted to God. He therefore is the devout man, who lives no longer to his own will, or the way and spirit of the world, but to the sole will of God ; who considers God in every thing, who serves God in every thing, who makes all the parts of his common life, parts of piety, by doing every thing in the name of God, and under such rules, as are conformable to his glory.

We readily acknowledge, that God alone is to be the rule and measure of our prayers ; that in them we are to look wholly unto him, and act wholly for him ; that we are to pray in such a manner only, for such things, and such ends, as are suitable to his glory.

Now let any one but find out the reason, why he is to be thus strictly pious in his prayers, and he will find the same as strong a reason to be as strictly pious in all the other parts of his life. For there is not the least shadow of a reason, why we should make God the rule and measure of our prayers, why we should then look wholly unto him, and pray according to his will ; but what equally proves it necessary for us to look wholly unto God, and make him the rule and measure of all the other actions of our life.

It is for want of knowing, or at least considering this, that we see such a mixture of ridicule in the lives of many people. You see them strict as to some times and places of devotion ; but when the service of the church is over, they are but like those, who seldom or never come there. In their way of life, their manner of spending their time and money, in their cares and fears, in their pleasures and indulgences, in their labour and diversions, they are like the rest of the world. This makes the loose part of the world generally make a jest of those, who are devout ; because they see their devotion goes no further than their prayers, and that when they

are over, they live no more unto God, till the time of prayer returns again ; but live by the same humour and fancy, and in as full an enjoyment of all the follies of life, as other people. This is the reason, why they are the jest and scorn of careless and worldly people ; not because they are really devoted to God, but because they appear to have no other devotion, but that of occasional prayers.

Julius is very fearful of missing prayers. All the parish supposes Julius to be sick, if he is not at church. But if you were to ask him, why he spends the rest of his time by humour or chance ? why he is a companion of the silliest people, in their most silly pleasures ? why he is ready for every impertinent entertainment and diversion ? if you were to ask him, why there is no amusement too trifling to please him ? if you ask him, why he never puts his conversation, his time, and fortune, under the rules of religion ? Julius has no more to say for himself, than the most disorderly person ; for the whole tenour of scripture lies as directly against such a life, as against debauchery and intemperance. He, that lives in such a course of idleness and folly, lives no more ac-

cording to the religion of Jesus Christ, than he, that lives in gluttony and intemperance.

If a man were to tell Julius, that there is no occasion for so much constancy at prayers, and that he may, without any harm to himself, neglect the service of the church, as the generality of people do, Julius would think such a one to be no christian, and that he ought to avoid his company. But if a person only tell him, that he may live, as the generality of the world do, that he may enjoy himself, as others do, that he may spend his time and money, as people of fashion do, that he may conform to the follies and frailties of the generality, and gratify his tempers and passions, as most people do ; Julius never suspects that man to want a christian spirit.

Yet if Julius were to read all the New-Testament, from the beginning to the end, he would find his course of life condemned in every page. Indeed nothing can be imagined more absurd in itself, than wise, and sublime, and heavenly prayers, added to a life of vanity and folly, where neither labour nor diversions, neither time nor money, are under the direction of the wisdom and heavenly tempers of our prayers. If we were to see a man pretending

to act wholly with regard to God in every thing he did ; that would spend neither time nor money, nor take any labour nor diversion, but so far as he could act according to strict principles of reason and piety, and yet at the same time neglect all prayer, whether publick or private, should we not be amazed at such a man, and wonder how he could have so much folly along with so much religion ?

Yet this is as reasonable, as for any person to pretend to strictness in devotion, to be careful of observing times and places of prayer, and yet let the rest of his life, his time and labour, his talents and money, be disposed of, without any regard to strict rules of piety and devotion. For it is as great an absurdity to suppose holy prayers and divine petitions, without holiness of life suitable to them, as to suppose a holy and divine life without prayers.

The short of the matter is this, either reason and religion prescribe rules and ends to all the ordinary actions of our life, or they do not. If they do, then it is as necessary to govern all our actions by those rules, as it is necessary to worship God. For if religion teach us any thing concerning eating and drinking, or spending our time and money ; if it teach us, how we are

to use and condemn the world ; if it tell us, what tempers we are to have in common life ; how we are to be disposed towards all people ; how we are to behave towards the sick, the poor, the old, and destitute ; if it tell us, whom we are to treat with a particular love, whom we are to regard with a particular esteem ; if it tell us, how we are to treat our enemies, and how we are to mortify and deny ourselves ; he must be very weak, that can think, these parts of religion are not to be observed with as much exactness, as any doctrines, that relate to prayers.

If contempt of the world and heavenly affection be a necessary temper of christians, it is necessary, that this temper appear in the whole course of their lives, in their manner of using the world ; because it can have no place anywhere else.

If self-denial be a condition of salvation, all, that would be saved, must make it a part of their ordinary life. If humility be a christian duty, then the common life of a christian is to be a constant course of humility in all its kinds. If poverty of spirit be necessary, it must be the spirit and temper of every day of our lives. If we be to relieve the naked, the sick, and the prisoner, it must be the common charity of our

lives, as far as we can render ourselves able to perform it. If we be to love our enemies, we must make our common life a visible exercise and demonstration of that love. If content and thankfulness, if the patient bearing of evil, be duties to God, they are the duties of every day, and in every circumstance of our life. If we must be wise and holy, as the new-born sons of God, we can no otherwise be so, but by renouncing every thing, that is foolish and vain in every part of our common life. If we must be in Christ new creatures, we must show, that we are so, by having new ways of living in the world. If we be to follow Christ, it must be in our common way of spending every day.

Thus it is in all the virtues and holy tempers of christianity, they are not ours, unless they are the virtues and tempers of our ordinary life. So that christianity is so far from leaving us to live in the common ways of life, conforming to the folly of customs, and gratifying the passions and tempers, which the spirit of the world delights in ; it is so far from indulging us in any of these things, that all its virtues, which it makes necessary to salvation, are only so many ways of living above, and contrary to the world, in all the common actions of our life. If our common

life be not a common course of humility, self-denial, renunciation of the world, poverty of spirit, and heavenly affection, we do not live the lives of christians.

CHAP. II.

An inquiry into the reason, why so many fall short of the holiness and devotion of christianity.

IT may now be reasonably inquired, how it comes to pass, that the lives of so many are strangely contrary to the principles of christianity. *It is, because men have not so much as the intention to please God in all their actions.*

We have chosen to explain this matter, by appealing to this intention, because it makes the case so plain, and because every one, that has a mind, may see it in the clearest light, and feel it in the strongest manner, only by looking into his own heart. For it is as easy for every person to know, whether he intend to please God in all his actions, as for any servant to know, whether this be his intention towards his master. Every one also can as easily tell, how he lays

out his money, and whether he consider, how to please God in it, as he can tell, where his estate is, and whether it be in money or land. So that here is no plea left for ignorance or frailty ; as to this matter, every body is in the light, and every body has power. No one can fail, but he, that is not so much a christian, as to intend to please God in the use of his estate.

You see two persons ; one is regular in publick and private prayer, the other is not. Now the reason of this difference is not this, that one has strength and power to observe prayer, and the other has not ; but the reason is, that one intends to please God in the duties of devotion, and the other has no intention about it. The case is the same in the right or wrong use of our time and money. You see one person throwing away his time in sleep and idleness, in visiting and diversions, and his money in the most vain and unreasonable expenses. You see another, careful of every day, dividing his hours by rules of reason and religion, and spending his money in works of charity. Now the difference is not owing to this, that one has strength and power to do thus, and the other has not ; but it is owing to this, that one intends to please God in the right use of his time

and his money, and the other has no intention about it.

Here therefore let us judge ourselves sincerely. Let us not vainly content ourselves with the common disorders of our lives, the vanity of our expenses, the folly of our diversions, the pride of our habits, the idleness of our lives, and the wasting of our time, fancying that these are such imperfections as we fall into, through the unavoidable weakness and frailty of our nature ; but let us be assured, that these disorders of our common life are owing to this, that we have not so much christianity, as to intend to please God in all the actions of our life, as the best and happiest thing in the world. So that we must not look upon ourselves in a state of common and pardonable imperfection, but in such a state, as wants the first and most fundamental principle of christianity, namely, an intention to please God in all our actions.

If any one were to ask himself, how it comes to pass, that there are any degrees of sobriety, which he neglects ; any practices of humility, which he wants ; any method of charity, which he does not follow ; any rules of redeeming time, which he does not observe ; his own heart will tell him, that it is, because he never

intended to be so exact in those duties. For whenever we fully intend it, it is as possible to conform to all this regularity of life, as it is possible for a man to observe times of prayer.

So that the fault does not lie here, that we desire to be good and perfect, but, through the weakness of our natures, fall short of it ; but it is, because we have not piety enough to intend to be as good as we can, or to please God in all the actions of our life. This, we see, is plainly the case of him, that spends his time in sports, when he should be at church ; it is not his want of power, but his want of intention, or desire, to be there.

The case is plainly the same in every other folly of human life. She, that spends her time and money in the unreasonable ways and fashions of the world, does not do so, because she wants power to be wise and religious in the management of her time and money ; but because she has no intention nor desire of being so. When she feels this intention, she will find it as possible to act up to it, as to be strictly sober and chaste, because it is her care and desire to be so.

This doctrine does not suppose, that we have no need of divine grace, nor that it is in our own

power to make ourselves perfect. It only supposes, that, through the want of a sincere intention of pleasing God in all our actions, we fall into such irregularities of life, as by the ordinary means of grace we should have power to avoid; and that we have not that perfection, which our present state of grace makes us capable of, because we do not so much as intend to have it.

It only teaches us, that the reason, why you see no real mortification, nor self-denial, no eminent charity, no profound humility, no heavenly affection, no true contempt of the world, no christian meekness, no sincere zeal, no eminent piety, in the common lives of men, is this, because they do not so much as intend to be exact and exemplary in these virtues.

CHAP. III.

Of the great danger and folly of remissness in duty.

ALTHOUGH the goodness of God and his rich mercies in Christ Jesus are a sufficient assurance to us, that he will be merciful to our unavoidable weaknesses, that is, to such failings,

as are the effects of ignorance or surprise ; yet we have no reason to expect the same mercy towards those sins, which we have lived in, through a want of intention to avoid them.

The salvation of our souls is set forth in scripture as a thing of difficulty, that requires all our diligence, that is to be worked out with fear and trembling.

We are told, that, ‘ Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, that leadeth unto life, and few there be, that find it ;’ that ‘ many are called, but few are chosen ;’ and that many will miss of their salvation, who seem to have taken some pains to obtain it. As in these words, ‘ Strive to enter in at the strait gate ; for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.’

Here our blessed Lord commands us to strive to enter in ; because many will fail, who only seek to enter. By which we are plainly taught, that religion is a state of labour and striving, and that many will fail of salvation ; not because they took no pains nor care about it, but because they did not take pains and care enough ; they only sought, but did not strive to enter in.

Every christian therefore should as well ex-

amine his life by these doctrines, as by the commandments. For these doctrines are as plain marks of our condition, as the commandments are plain marks of our duty.

For if salvation be given to those only who strive for it, then it is as reasonable for me to consider, whether my course of life be a course of striving to obtain it, as to consider whether I be keeping any of the commandments.

If my religion be only a formal compliance with those modes of worship, that are in fashion, where I live ; if it cost me no pains nor trouble ; if it lay me under no rules and restraints ; if I have no careful thoughts and sober reflections about it ; is it not great weakness to think that I am ‘striving to enter in at the strait gate?’

If I am seeking every thing that can delight my senses, and regale my appetites, spending my time and fortune in pleasures, in diversions, and worldly enjoyments, a stranger to watchings, fastings, prayers, and mortification, how can it be said, that I am ‘working out my salvation with fear and trembling?’

The sum of this matter is this...From the aforementioned, and many other passages of scripture, it seems plain, that our salvation de-

pends upon the sincerity and perfection of our endeavours to obtain it.

Weak and imperfect men shall, notwithstanding their frailties and defects, be received, as having pleased God, if they have done their utmost to please him.

The rewards of charity, piety, and humility will be given to those, whose lives have been a careful labour to exercise these virtues in as high a degree as they could.

We cannot offer to God the service of angels; we cannot obey him, as man in a state of perfection could; but fallen men can do their best, and this is the perfection, that is required of us; it is only the perfection of our best endeavours, a careful labour to be as perfect as we can.

But if we stop short of this, for ought we know, we stop short of the mercy of God, and leave ourselves nothing to plead from the terms of the gospel. For God has there made no promises of mercy to the slothful and negligent. His mercy is offered only to our frail and imperfect, but best endeavours, to practise all manner of righteousness.

As the law to angels is angelical righteousness; as the law to perfect beings is strict per-

fection ; so the law to our imperfect natures is the best obedience, that our frail nature is able to perform.

The measure of our love to God seems, in justice, to be the measure of our love of every virtue. We are to love and practise it ‘with all our hearts, with all our soul, with all our mind, and with all our strength.’ When we cease to live with this regard to virtue, we live below our nature, and, instead of being able to plead our infirmities, we stand chargeable with negligence.

It is for this reason, that we are exhorted to work out our salvation with fear and trembling ; because, unless our heart and passions are eagerly bent upon the work of our salvation ; unless holy fears animate our endeavours, and keep our consciences strict and tender about every part of our duty, constantly examining how we live, and how fit we are to die, we shall, in all probability, fall into a state of negligence, and sit down in such a course of life, as will never carry us to the rewards of heaven.

He, who considers that a just God can make such allowances only, as are suitable to his justice, that our works are all to be examined by fire, will find, that fear and trembling are

proper tempers for those, that are drawing near so great a trial.

Indeed there is no probability, that any one should do all the duty, that is expected from him, or make that progress in piety, which the holiness and justice of God requires of him, but he, that is constantly afraid of falling short of it.

Now this is not intended to possess people's minds with a scrupulous anxiety, and discontent in the service of God; but to fill them with a just fear of living in sloth and idleness, and in the neglect of such virtues, as they will want at the day of judgment.

It is to excite them to an earnest examination of their lives, to such zeal, and care, and concern after christian perfection, as they use in any matter, that has gained their heart and affections.

It is only desiring them to be so apprehensive of their state, so humble in the opinion of themselves, so earnest after higher degrees of piety, and so fearful of falling short of happiness, as the great apostle St. Paul was, when he thus wrote to the Philippians; 'Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect; but this one thing I do, forgetting those things, which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things, which are before; I press to-

ward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.' And then he adds. 'Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, be thus minded.'

But now, if the apostle thought it necessary for those, who were in this state of perfection, to 'be thus minded ;' that is, thus labouring, pressing, and aspiring after some degree of holiness, at which they had not then arrived ; surely it is much more necessary for us, to 'be thus minded ;' that is, thus earnest and striving after such degrees of a holy and divine life, as we have not yet attained.

The best way for any one to know, how much he ought to aspire after holiness, is to consider, not how much will make his present life easy, but to ask himself, how much, he thinks, will make him easy at the hour of death.

Now any man, that dares be so serious, as to put this question to himself, will be forced to answer, that, at death, every one will wish, that he had been as perfect, as human nature can be.

Is not this therefore sufficient to put us not only upon wishing, but labouring after all that perfection, which we shall then lament the want of ? Is it not excessive folly, to be content with such a course of piety, as, we already know, can

not content us, at a time when we shall so want it, as to have nothing else to comfort us ? How can we carry a severer condemnation against ourselves, than to believe, that at the hour of death we shall want the virtues of the saints, and wish, that we had been amongst the first servants of God, and yet take no methods of arriving at the height of piety, whilst we are alive ?

Though this is an absurdity, that we can easily pass over at present, whilst the health of our bodies, the passions of our minds, the noise, and hurry, and pleasures, and business of the world, lead us on with eyes, that see not, and ears, that hear not ; yet at death, it will set itself before us in a dreadful magnitude, it will haunt us like a dismal ghost, and our conscience will never let us take our eyes from it.

We see, in worldly matters, what a torment self-condemnation is ; and how hardly a man is able to forgive himself, when he has brought himself into any calamity or disgrace, purely by his own folly. The affliction is made doubly tormenting ; because he is forced to charge it all upon himself, as his own act and deed, against the nature and reason of things, and contrary to the advice of all his friends.

By this we may in some degree guess,

how terrible the pain of that self-condemnation will be, when a man shall find himself in the miseries of death, under the severity of a self-condemning conscience, charging all his distress upon his own folly and madness, against the sense and reason of his own mind, against all the doctrines and precepts of religion and contrary to all the instructions, calls, and warnings, both of God and man.

CHAP. IV.

*We can please God in no state, nor employment of life,
but by devoting it to his glory.*

HAVING, in the first chapter, stated the general nature of devotion, we shall now descend to some particulars, and show, how we are to devote our labour and employment, our time and fortunes unto God.

As a good christian should consider every place as holy, because God is there, so he should look upon every part of his life as a matter of holiness, because it is to be offered unto God.

The profession of a clergyman is a holy pro-

session ; because it is a ministration in holy things, an attendance at the altar. But worldly business is to be made holy unto the Lord, by being done as a service to him, and in conformity to his divine will.

For as all men and all things in the world as truly belong unto God, as any places, things, or persons, that are devoted to divine service ; so all things are to be used, and all persons are to act, in their several states and employments, for the glory of God.

Men of worldly business therefore must not look upon themselves at liberty to live to themselves, to sacrifice to their own humours and temper ; because their employment is of a worldly nature. But they must consider, that as the world and all worldly professions as truly belong to God, as persons and things, that are devoted to the altar ; so it is as much the duty of men in worldly business to live wholly unto God, as it is the duty of those, who are devoted to divine service.

As the whole world is God's, so the whole world is to act for God. As all men have the same relation to God, as all men have all their powers and faculties from God ; so all men are

obliged to act for God with all their powers and faculties.

As all things are God's, so all things are to be used and regarded as the things of God. For men to abuse things on earth, and live to themselves, is the same rebellion against God, as for angels to abuse things in heaven ; because God is just the same Lord of all on earth, as he is the Lord of all in heaven.

Things may, and must differ in their use ; but yet they are all to be used according to the will of God.

Men may and must differ in their employments ; yet they must all act for the same ends, as dutiful servants of God, in the right and pious performance of their several callings.

Clergymen must live wholly unto God in one particular way ; that is, in the exercise of holy offices, in the ministration of prayers and sacraments, and a zealous distribution of spiritual goods.

But men of other employments are, in their particular ways, as much obliged to act as the servants of God, and live wholly unto him in their several callings.

This is the only difference between clergymen and people of other callings.

When it can be shown, that men might be vain, covetous, sensual, worldly-minded, or proud in the exercise of their worldly business, then it will be allowable for clergymen to indulge the same tempers in their sacred profession. For though these tempers are most odious and most criminal in clergymen, who, besides their baptismal vow, have a second time devoted themselves to God, to be his servants, not in the common offices of human life, but in the spiritual service of the most holy and sacred things ; and who are, therefore, to keep themselves as separate and different from the common life of other men, as a church, or an altar, is to be kept separate from houses and tables of common use. Yet, as all christians are, by their baptism, devoted to God, and made professors of holiness, so are they all, in their several callings, to live as holy and heavenly persons ; doing every thing in their common life only in such a manner, as it may be received by God, as a service done to him. For things spiritual and temporal, sacred and common, must, like men and angels, like heaven and earth, all conspire in the glory of God.

To make our labour or employment an acceptable service unto God, we must carry it

on with the same spirit and temper, that is required in the giving of alms, or any work of piety. For if ‘ whether we eat or drink, or whatsoever we do, we must do all to the glory of God ;’ if ‘ we are to use this world as if we used it not ;’ if we are to ‘ present our bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God ;’ if ‘ we are to live by faith, and not by sight,’ and to ‘ have our conversation in heaven ;’ then it is necessary, that the common way of our life in every state, be ready to glorify God by such tempers, as make our prayers and adorations acceptable to him. For if we are worldly or earthly minded in our employments, if they are carried on with vain desires, and covetous tempers, only to satisfy ourselves, we can no more be said to live to the glory of God, than gluttons and drunkards can be said to eat and drink to the glory of God.

Calidus has traded above thirty years in the greatest town in the country. He has been so many years constantly increasing his trade and his fortune. Every hour of the day is with him an hour of business ; and though he eats and drinks very heartily, yet every meal seems to be in a hurry, and he would say grace, if he had time. Calidus ends every day at the tavern; but has not

leisure to be there, till near nine o'clock. He is always forced to drink a good hearty glass, to drive thoughts of business out of his head, and make his spirits drowsy enough for sleep. He does business all the time, that he is rising, and has settled several matters, before he can get to his compting house. His prayers are a short ejaculation or two, which he never misses in stormy, tempestuous weather; because he has always some thing or other at sea. Calidus will tell you with great pleasure, that he has been in this hurry for so many years, and that it must have killed him long ago, but, it has been a rule with him to get out of the town every Saturday, and make the Sunday a day of quiet and good refreshment in the country.

He is now so rich, that he would leave off his business, and amuse his old age with building and furnishing a fine house in the country; but he is afraid, he should grow melancholy, if he were to quit his business. He will tell you with great gravity, that it is a dangerous thing for a man, that has been used to get money, ever to leave it off. If thoughts of religion happen at any time to steal into his head, Calidus contents himself with thinking, that he never was a friend to hereticks and infidels; that he has

always been civil to the minister of his parish, and very often given something to charitable purposes.

This way of life is at such a distance from all the doctrine and discipline of christianity, that no one can live in it through ignorance or frailty. Calidus can no more imagine, that ‘he is born of the spirit ;’ that he is ‘in Christ a new creature ;’ that he lives ‘here as a stranger and pilgrim, setting his affections upon things above, and laying up treasures in heaven,’ than he can think, that he has been all his life an apostle, working miracles, and preaching the gospel.

It must also be owned, that many trading people especially in great towns, are too much like Calidus. You see them all the week buried in business, unable to think of any thing else ; and then spending the Sunday in idleness and refreshment, in wandering into the country, in such visits and jovial meetings, as make it often the worst day of the week.

They do not live thus, because they cannot support themselves with less care and application to business ; but they live thus, because they want to grow rich in their trades, and to maintain their families in some such fit

gure and degree of finery, as a reasonable christian life has no occasion for. Take away but this temper, and people of all trades will find themselves at leisure to live every day like christians, to be careful of every duty of the gospel, to live in a visible course of religion, and be every day strict observers both of publick and private prayer.

The only way to do this is for people to consider their trade as something, which they are obliged to devote to the glory of God, something, which they are to do in such a manner only that they make it a duty to him. Nothing can be right in business, which is not under these rules. The apostle commands servants ‘to be obedient to their masters in singleness of heart, as unto Christ ; not with eye-service, as men pleasers, but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart ; with good will doing service as unto the Lord, and not unto men.’

This passage sufficiently shows, that all christians are to live wholly unto God in every state and condition, doing the work of their common calling in such a manner, and for such ends, as to make it a part of their devotion or service

to God. For certainly if poor slaves are not to comply with their business, as men-pleasers, if they are to look wholly unto God in all their actions, and serve in singleness of heart, as unto the Lord; surely men of other employments and conditions must be as much obliged to go through their business with the same singleness of heart ; not as pleasing the vanity of their own minds, not as gratifying their own selfish, worldly passions, but as the servants of God in all that they have to do. For surely no one will say, that a slave is to devote his state of life unto God, and make the will of God the sole rule and end of his service, but that a tradesman need not act with the same spirit of devotion in his business. This is as absurd, as to make it necessary for one man to be more just or faithful than another.

It is therefore absolutely certain, that no christian is to enter any further into business, nor for any other ends, than such, as he can in singleness of heart offer unto God, as a reasonable service. For the son of God has redeemed us for this only end, that we should by a life of reason and piety live to the glory of God. This is the only rule and measure for every order and state of life. Without this rule, the most lawful employment becomes a sinful state of life.

Enough, I hope, has been said, to show you the necessity of introducing religion into all the actions of your common life, and of living and acting with the same regard to God in all which you do, as in your prayers and alms.

Eating is one of the lowest actions of our lives. It is common to us with mere animals; yet we see, that the piety of all ages in the world has turned this ordinary action of an animal life into piety to God, by making every meal to begin, and end with devotion.

We see yet some remains of this custom in most christian families ; some such little formality, as shows you, that people used to call upon God at the beginning and end of their meals. But indeed it is now generally so performed, as to look more like a mockery upon devotion, than any solemn application of the mind unto God. In one house you may perhaps see the head of the family just pulling off his hat, in another half getting up from his seat. Another shall, it may be, proceed so far, as to make, as if he said something. But however these little attempts are the remains of some devotion, which was formerly used at such times, and are proofs that religion has formerly belonged to this part of common life.

But to such a pass are we now come, that, though the custom is yet preserved, we can hardly bear with him, who seems to perform it with any degree of seriousness ; and look upon it as a sign of a fanatical temper, if a man have not done it as soon as he begins.

I would not be thought to plead for the necessity of long prayers at these times ; but thus much, I think, may be said, that, if prayer be proper at these times, we ought to oblige ourselves to use such a form of words, as should show, that we solemnly appeal to God for such graces and blessings as are then proper to the occasion ; otherwise the mock ceremony, instead of blessing our victuals, does but accustom us to trifle with devotion, and give us a habit of being unaffected with our prayers.

If every head of a family were, at the return of every meal, to oblige himself to make a solemn adoration of God, in such a decent manner, as becomes a devout mind, it would be very likely to teach him, that swearing, sensuality, gluttony, and loose discourse were very improper at those meals, which were to begin and end with devotion.

If, in these days of corruption, this part of devotion is fallen into a mock ceremony, it must be imputed to this cause, that sensuality and intemperance have too great a power over us, to suffer us to add any devotion to our meals. But this must be said, that, when we are as pious, as Jews and heathens of all ages have been, we shall think it proper to pray at the beginning and end of our meals.

I have appealed to this pious custom of all ages of the world, as a proof of the reasonableness of the doctrine of this and the foregoing chapters ; that is, as a proof, that religion is to be the rule and measure of all the actions of ordinary life. For surely, if we are not to eat, but under such rules of devotion, it must plainly appear, that whatever else we do, must, in its proper way, be done with the same regard to the glory of God, and agreeable to the principles of a devout and pious mind.

CHAP. V.

Persons, who are free from the necessity of labour, are to consider themselves as devoted to God in a higher degree.

The GREAT part of the world are free from the necessities of labour and employments, and have their time and fortunes at their own disposal.

They are those, of whom ‘much will be required,’ because ‘much is given unto them.’

A slave can only live unto God in one particular way ; that is, by religious patience and submission in his state of slavery.

But all the ways of holy living, all instances, and all kinds of virtue, lie open to those, who are masters of themselves, their time, and their fortune.

It is as much the duty therefore of such persons, to make a wise use of their liberty, to devote themselves to all kinds of virtue, to aspire after every thing, that is holy and pious, to endeavour to be eminent in all good works, and to please God in the highest and most perfect manner ; it is as much their duty to be thus wise in the conduct of themselves, and thus ex-

tensive in their endeavours after holiness, as it is the duty of a slave to be resigned unto God in his state of slavery.

You are no labourer nor tradesman ; you are neither merchant nor soldier. Consider yourself therefore as placed in a state, in some degree, like that of good angels, who are sent into the world as ministering spirits for the general good of mankind, to assist, protect, and minister for them, who shall be heirs of salvation.

For the more you are free from the common necessities of men, the more you are to imitate the higher perfections of angels.

Had you, Serena, been obliged by the necessities of life to wash clothes for your maintenance, or to wait upon some mistress, who demanded all your labour, it would then be your duty to serve and glorify God by such humility, obedience, and faithfulness, as might adorn that state of life.

It would then be recommended to your care, to improve that one talent to its greatest height; that, when the time came, that mankind were to be rewarded for their labours by the great judge of quick and dead, you might be received with a ‘well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.’

But, as God has given you five talents, as he has placed you above the necessities of life, as he has left you in the hands of yourself, in the happy liberty of choosing the most exalted ways of virtue, as he has enriched you with many gifts of fortune, and left you nothing to do, but to make the best use of variety of blessings, to make the most of a short life, to study your own perfection, the honour of God, and the good of your neighbour ; so it is now your duty to imitate the greatest servants of God, to inquire, how the most eminent saints have lived, to study all the arts and methods of perfection, and to set no bounds to your love and gratitude to the bountiful author of so many blessings.

It is now your duty to turn your five talents into five more ; and to consider, how your time, and leisure, and health, and fortune may be made so many happy means of purifying your own soul, improving your fellow-creatures in the ways of virtue, and of carrying you at last to the greatest heights of eternal glory.

As you have no mistress to serve, so let your own soul be the object of your daily care and attendance. Be sorry for its impurities, its spots, and imperfections, and study all the holy

arts of restoring it to its natural and primitive purity.

Delight in its service, and beg of God to adorn it with every grace and perfection.

Nourish it with good works ; give it peace in solitude ; get it strength in prayer ; make it wise with reading ; enlighten it by meditation ; make it tender with love ; sweeten it with humility ; humble it with patience ; enliven it with psalms and hymns ; and comfort it with frequent reflections upon future glory. Keep it in the presence of God, and teach it to imitate those guardian angels, who, though they attend on human affairs, and the lowest of mankind, yet ‘ always behold the face of our Father, who is in heaven.’

This, Serena, is your profession. For, as sure as God is one God, so sure it is, that he has but one command to all mankind, whether they be bound or free, rich or poor ; and that is, to act up to the excellency of that nature, which he has given them, to live by reason, to walk in the light of religion, to use every thing, as wisdom directs, to glorify God in all his gifts, and dedicate every condition of life to his service.

This is the one common command of God to all mankind. If you have an employment, you are to be thus reasonable, and pious, and

holy in the exercise of it. If you have time and fortune in your own power, you are obliged to be thus reasonable, and holy, and pious in the use of all your time and all your fortune.

When therefore you would represent to your mind, how christians ought to live unto God, and in what degrees of wisdom and holiness they ought to use the things of this life ; you must not look at the world, but you must look up to God, and the society of angels, and think, what wisdom and holiness are fit to prepare you for such a state of glory ; you must look to all the highest precepts of the gospel ; you must examine yourself by the spirit of Christ ; you must think, how the wisest men in the world have lived ; you must think how departed souls would live, if they were again to act the short part of human life ; you must think, what degrees of wisdom and holiness you will wish for, when you are leaving the world.

All this is not over-straining the matter, nor proposing to ourselves any needless perfection. It is but barely complying with the apostle's advice, where he says, 'Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are of good report ; if there be any vir-

tue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.' For no one can come near the doctrine of this passage, but he, who proposes to himself to do every thing in this life as a servant of God, to live by reason in every thing, that he does, and to make the wisdom and holiness of the gospel, the rule and measure of his desiring and using every gift of God.

CHAP. VI.

On the great obligations of making a wise and religious use of our possessions.

AS the holiness of christianity consecrates all states and employments of life unto God, as it requires us to aspire after universal obedience, doing and using every thing as the servants of God, so are we more especially obliged to observe this religious exactness in the use of our estates and fortunes.

The reason of this would appear very plain, if we were only to consider, that our estate is as much the gift of God, as our eyes or our hands, and is no more to be buried or thrown

away at pleasure, than we are to put out our eyes, or throw away our limbs, as we please.

But, besides this consideration, there are several other great and important reasons, why we should be religiously exact in the use of our estates.

First. Because the manner of using our money, or spending our estate enters so far into the business of every day, and makes so great a part of our common life, that our common life must be much of the same nature, as our common way of spending our estate. If reason and religion govern us in this, then reason and religion have great hold of us ; but if humour, pride, and fancy be the measures of our spending our estate, then humour, pride, and fancy will have the direction of the greatest part of our life.

Secondly. Another great reason for devoting all our estate to right uses is this ; because it is capable of being used to the most excellent purposes, and is so great a mean of doing good. If we waste it, we do not waste a trifle, that signifies little ; but we waste that, which might be made, as eyes to the blind, as a husband to the widow, as a father to the orphan. We waste that, which not only enables us to minister world-

ly comforts to those, who are in distress, but that, which might purchase for ourselves everlasting treasures in heaven. So that if we part with our money in foolish ways, we part with a great power of comforting our fellow-creatures, and of making ourselves forever blessed.

If there be nothing so glorious as doing good, if there be nothing, which makes us so like to God, then nothing can be so glorious in the use of our money, as to use it in works of love and goodness, making ourselves friends, and fathers, and benefactors to all our fellow-creatures, imitating the divine love, and turning all our power into acts of generosity, care, and kindness to such as are in need of it.

Thirdly. If we waste our money, we are not only guilty of wasting a talent, which God has given us, we are not only guilty of making that useless, which is so powerful a mean of doing good ; but we do ourselves this further harm, that we turn this useful talent into a powerful mean of corrupting ourselves ; because so far as it is spent wrong, so far it is spent in the support of some wrong temper, in gratifying some vain and unreasonable desires, in conforming to those fashions and pride of the world, which,

as christians and reasonable men, we are obliged to renounce.

As wit and fine parts cannot be trifled away and only lost, but will expose those, who have them into greater follies, if they be not strictly devoted to piety ; so money, if it be not used strictly according to reason and religion, cannot only be trifled away, but it will betray people into greater follies, and make them live a more silly and extravagant life, than they could have done without it. If therefore you do not spend your money in doing good to others, you must spend it to the hurt of yourself. You will act like a man, who should refuse to give that, as a cordial to a sick friend, though he could not drink it himself without inflaming his blood. For this is the case of superfluous money ; if you give it to those, who want it, it is a cordial ; if you spend it upon yourself in something, which you do not want, it only inflames and disorders your mind, and makes you worse, than you would be without it.

You must therefore no more conform to these ways of the world, than you must conform to the vices of the world. You must no more spend with those, who idly waste their money, as their own humour leads them, than you must drink

with the drunken, or indulge yourself with the epicure ; because a course of such expenses is no more consistent with a life of charity, than excess in drinking is consistent with a life of sobriety. When therefore any one tells you of the lawfulness of expensive apparel, or the innocence of pleasing yourself with costly satisfactions; only imagine, that the same person was to tell you, that you need not do works of charity ; that Christ does not require you to do good unto your poor brethren, as unto him ; and then you will see the wickedness of such advice ; for to tell you, that you may live in such expenses, as make it impossible for you to live in the exercise of good works is the same thing, as telling you, that you need not have any care about such good works themselves.

CHAP. VII.

The ill effects resulting from the imprudent use of an estate, represented in the character of Flavia.

IT has been already observed, that a prudent and religious care is to be used in the manner of spending our money or estate ; be-

cause the manner of spending our estate makes so great a part of our common life, and is so much the business of every day, that, accordingly as we are wise, or imprudent in this respect, the whole course of our lives will be rendered very wise, or very full of folly.

Flavia and Miranda are two maiden sisters, who have each of them two hundred pounds a year. They buried their parents twenty years ago, and have since that time spent their estate, as they pleased.

Flavia has been the wonder of all her friends for her excellent management in making so surprising a figure in so moderate a fortune. Several ladies, who have twice her fortune, are not able to be always so genteel, and so constant at all places of pleasure and expense. She has every thing, which is in the fashion, and is in every place, where there is any diversion. Flavia is very orthodox. She talks warmly against hereticks and schismaticks, is generally at church, and often at the sacrament. She once commended a sermon, that was against the pride and vanity of dress, and thought, it was very just against Lucinda, whom she takes to be a great deal finer than she needs to be. If any one ask Flavia to do something in charity, if she like

the person, who makes the proposal, or happen to be in a right temper, she will toss him a half crown, or a crown, and tell him, if he knew what a long milliner's bill she had just received, he would think it a great deal for her to give. A quarter of a year after this, she hears a sermon upon the necessity of charity ; she thinks the man preaches well, that it is a very proper subject, that people want much to be put in mind of it ; but she applies nothing to herself ; because she remembers, that she gave a crown sometime ago, when she could so ill spare it.

As for poor people themselves, she will admit of no complaints from them. She is very positive, they are all cheats and liars, and will say any thing to get relief, and therefore it must be a sin to encourage them in their evil ways.

You would think, Flavia had the tenderest conscience in the world, if you were to see how scrupulous and apprehensive she is of the guilt and danger of giving amiss.

She buys all books of wit and humour, and has made an expensive collection of all the English poets. For she says, one cannot have a true taste of any of them, without being very conversant with them all. She will sometimes read a book of piety, if it be a short one, if it be

much commended for style and language, and she can tell where to borrow it.

Flavia would be a miracle of piety, if she were but half so careful of her soul, "as she is of her body. The rising of a pimple in her face, the sting of a gnat will make her keep her room two or three days, and she thinks, they are very rash people, who do not take care of things in time. This makes her so over-careful of her health, that she never thinks she is well enough ; and so over indulgent, that she can never be really well.

If you visit Flavia on the sunday, you will always meet good company, you will know what is doing in the world, you will hear the last lampoon, be told who wrote it, and who is meant by every name, that is in it ; you will hear what plays were acted that week, who was intolerable at the last assembly, and what games are most in fashion. Flavia thinks they are atheists, who play at cards on sundays ; but she will tell you the nicety of all the games, what cards she held, how she held them, and the history of all, that happened at play, as soon as she comes from church. If you would know, who is rude and ill natured, who is vain and foppish, who lives too high, and who is in debt ; if you

would know, what is the quarrel at a certain house, or who and who are in love ; if you would know, how late Belinda comes home at night, what clothes she has bought, how she loves compliments, and what a long story she told at such a place ; if you would know, how cross Lucius is to his wife, what ill-natured things he says to her, when no body hears him ; if you would know, how they hate one another in their hearts, though they appear so kind in publick ; you must visit Flavia on the sunday. But still she has so great a regard for the holiness of sunday, that she has turned a poor old widow out of her house, as a profane wretch, for having been found once mending her clothes on sunday night.

Thus lives Flavia ; and if she live ten years longer, she will have spent about fifteen hundred and sixty sundays after this manner. She will have worn about two hundred different suits of clothes. Out of these thirty years of her life, fifteen of them will have been disposed of in bed ; and of the remaining fifteen, about fourteen of them will have been consumed in eating, drinking, dressing, visiting, conversation, reading and hearing plays and romances, at assemblies, balls, and diversions. For you may reckon all the

time she is up, thus spent, except about an hour and a half, which is disposed of at church, most sundays in the year. With great management, and under mighty rules of economy, she will have spent sixty hundred pounds upon herself, bating only some shillings, crowns, or half crowns, which have gone from her in accidental charities.

We shall not take upon ourselves to say, that it is impossible for Flavia to be saved ; but thus much must be said, that she has no grounds from scripture to think, she is in the way to salvation. For her whole life is in direct opposition to all those tempers and practices, which the gospel has made necessary to salvation.

If you were to hear her say, that she had lived all her life like Anna the prophetess, who ‘departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day,’ you would look upon her as very extravagant ; and yet this would be no greater an extravagance than for her to say, that she had been ‘striving to enter in at the strait gate,’ or making any one doctrine of the gospel a rule of her life.

She may as well say, that she lived with our saviour, when he was upon earth, as that she has lived in imitation of him, or made it any

part of her care to live in such tempers, as he required of all those, who would be his disciples. She may as truly say, that she has every day washed the saints' feet, as that she has lived in christian humility and poverty of spirit ; and as reasonably think, that she has taught a charity school, as that she has lived in works of charity. She has as much reason to think, that she has been a centinel in an army, as that she has lived in watching and self-denial. It may as fairly be said, that she lived by the labour of her hands, as that she had ' given all diligence to make her calling and election sure.'

Here it is to be well observed, that the poor, vain turn of mind, the irreligion, the folly, and vanity of this whole life of Flavia is all owing to the manner of using her estate. It is this, which has formed her spirit, which has given life to every idle temper, which has supported every trifling passion, and kept her from all thoughts of a prudent, useful, and devout life.

When her parents died, she had no thought about her two hundred pounds a year, but that she had so much money to do what she would with, to spend upon herself, and purchase the pleasures and gratifications of all her passions.

It is this setting out, this false judgment, and indiscreet use of her fortune, that has filled her whole life with the same indiscretion, and kept her from thinking of what is right, and wise, and pious in every thing else.

Though the irregular trifling spirit of this character belongs, I hope, but to few people; yet many may here learn some instruction from it, and perhaps see something of their own spirit in it.

For, as Flavia seems to be undone by the unreasonable use of her fortune, so the lowness of most people's virtue, the imperfections of their piety, and the disorders of their passions are generally owing to their imprudent use and enjoyment of lawful and innocent things.

More people are kept from a true sense and taste of religion, by a regular kind of sensuality and indulgence, than by gross drunkenness. More men live regardless of the great duties of piety, through too great a concern for worldly goods, than through direct injustice.

This man would perhaps be devout, if he were not so great a virtuoso. Another is deaf to all the motives to piety by indulging an idle, slothful temper.

Could you cure this man of his great curiosity and inquisitive temper, or that of his false satisfaction and thirst after learning, you need do no more to make them both become men of great piety.

If this woman would make fewer visits, or that not be always talking, they would neither of them find it half so hard to be affected with religion.

For all these things are only little, when they are compared to great sins ; and though they are little in that respect, yet they are great, as they are impediments and hindrances of a pious spirit.

As consideration is the only eye of the soul, as the truths of religion can be seen by nothing else, so whatever raises a levity of mind, a trifling spirit, renders the soul incapable of seeing, apprehending, and relishing the doctrines of piety.

Would we therefore make a real progress in religion, we must not only abhor gross and notorious sins, but we must regulate the innocent and lawful parts of our behaviour, and put the most common and allowed actions of life under the rules of discretion and piety.

CHAP. VIII.

*The beneficial effects, which result from the pious use of
an estate, represented in the character of Miranda.*

ANY one pious regularity of any one part of our life is of great advantage, not only on its own account, but as it uses us to live by rule, and think of the government of ourselves.

A man of business, who has brought one part of his affairs under certain rules, is in a fair way to take the same care of the rest.

So he, who has brought any one part of his life under the rules of religion, may thence be taught to extend the same order and regularity into other parts of his life.

A rule, which relates even to the smallest part of our life, is of great benefit to us, merely as it is a rule.

For, as the proverb says, ‘he that has begun well, has half done :’ So he, who has begun to live by rule, has gone a great way towards the perfection of his life.

By rule, must here be constantly understood a religious rule, observed upon a principle of duty to God.

But the two things, which of all others of a worldly nature most want to be under a strict rule, and which are the greatest blessings both to ourselves and to others, when they are rightly used, are our time and our money. These talents are continual means and opportunities of doing good.

He, who is piously strict, and exact in the wise management of either of these, cannot be long ignorant of the right use of the other. He, who is happy in the religious care and disposal of them both, is already ascended several steps upon the ladder of christian perfection.

Miranda, the sister of Flavia, is a sober, reasonable christian. As soon as she was mistress of her time and fortune, it was her first thought, how she might best fulfil every thing which God required of her in the use of them ; and how she might make the best and happiest use of this short life. She depends upon the truth of what our blessed Lord has said, that ‘there is but one thing needful ;’ and therefore makes her whole life but one continual labour after it. She has but one reason for doing or not doing, for liking or not liking any thing ; and that is the will of God.

The holy scriptures, especially of the New-Testament, are her daily study. These she reads with a watchful attention, constantly casting an eye upon herself, and trying herself by every doctrine, which is there. When she has the New-Testament in her hand, she supposes herself at the feet of our saviour and his apostles ; and makes every thing, which she learns of them, so many laws of her life. She receives their sacred words with as much attention and reverence, as if she saw their persons, and knew, that they were just come from heaven, on purpose to teach her the way, which leads to it.

She thinks, that the trying of herself every day by the doctrines of scripture is the only possible way to be ready for her trial at the last day. She is sometimes afraid, that she lays out too much money in books ; because she cannot forbear buying all practical books of any note ; especially such as enter into the heart of religion, and describe the inward holiness of the christian life.

To relate her charity would be to relate the history of every day for twenty years ; for so long has her fortune been spent that way. She has set up near twenty poor tradesmen, who had failed in their business, and saved as many

from failing. She has educated several poor children, who were picked up in the streets, and put them in a way of an honest employment. As soon as any poor labourer is confined at home with sickness, she sends him, till he recovers, twice the value of his wages, that he may have one part to give to his family, as usual, and the other to provide things convenient for his sickness.

If a family seem too large to be supported by the labour of those, who can work in it, she pays their rent, and gives them something yearly towards their clothing. By these means there are many poor families, who live in a comfortable manner, and are from year to year blessing her in their prayers.

If there be any poor man or woman, who is more than ordinarily wicked and reprobate, Miranda has her eye upon them, she watches their time of need and adversity ; and, if she can discover that they are in any great straits or affliction, she gives them speedy relief. She has this care for this sort of people, because she once saved a very profligate person from being carried to prison, who immediately became a true penitent. There is nothing in the character of Miranda more to be admired, than this temper.

For this tenderness of affection towards the most abandoned sinners is the highest instance of a divine and godlike soul.

Miranda is a constant relief to poor people in their misfortunes and accidents. There are sometimes little misfortunes, that happen to them, which of themselves they could never be able to overcome. The death of a cow, or horse, or some little robbery would keep them in distress all their lives. She does not suffer them to grieve under such accidents, as these. She immediately gives them the full value of their loss, and makes use of it, as a mean of raising their minds towards God.

This is the spirit, and this is the life of the devout Miranda ; and, if she live ten years longer, she will have spent sixty hundred pounds in charity ; for that, which she allows herself, may fairly be reckoned amongst her alms.

When she dies, she must shine amongst apostles, and saints, and martyrs ; she must stand amongst the first servants of God, and be glorious amongst those, who have fought the good fight, and finished their course with joy.

CHAP. IX.

Persons of all orders and ranks in society are obliged to devote themselves unto God.

WE have, in the foregoing chapters, gone through the several great instances of christian devotion, and shown, that all the parts of our common life, our employments, our talents, and gifts of fortune, are all to be made holy and acceptable unto God, by a wise and religious use of every thing, and by directing our actions and designs to such ends, as are suitable to the honour and glory of God.

We shall now show, that this regularity of devotion, this holiness of common life, this religious use of every thing, which we have, is a devotion, that is the duty of all orders of christian people.

Every body acknowledges, that all orders of men are to be equally and exactly honest and faithful. There is no exception to be made in these duties for any private or particular state of life. If we would but attend to the reason and nature of things; if we would but consider the nature of God, and the nature of

man, we should find the same necessity for every other right use of our reason, for every grace, or religious temper of the christian life ; we should find it as absurd to suppose, that one man must be exact in piety, and another needs not, as to suppose, that one man must be exact in honesty, but another needs not. For christian humility, sobriety, devotion, and piety are as great and necessary parts of a reasonable life, as justice and honesty.

On the other hand, pride, sensuality, and covetousness are as great disorders of the soul, are as high an abuse of our reason, and as contrary to God, as cheating and dishonesty.

Theft and dishonesty seem indeed to vulgar eyes to be greater sins ; because they are so hurtful to civil society, and are so severely punished by human laws.

But if we consider mankind in a higher view, as God's order or society of rational beings, who are to glorify him by the right use of their reason, and by acting conformably to the order of their nature, we shall find, that every temper, which is equally contrary to reason and order, which opposes God's ends and designs, and disorders the beauty and glory of the rational world, is equally sinful in man, and equally

odious to God. This would show us, that the sin of sensuality is like the sin of dishonesty, and renders us as great objects of the divine displeasure.

Nothing therefore can be more false, than to imagine, that, because we are private persons, who have taken upon us no charge nor employment of life, that therefore we may live more at large, indulge our appetites, and be less careful of the duties of piety and holiness ; for it is as good an excuse for cheating and dishonesty. Because he, who abuses his reason, who indulges himself in lust and sensuality, and neglects to act the wise and reasonable part of a true christian, has every thing in his life to render him hateful to God, which is to be found in cheating and dishonesty.

If therefore you rather choose to be an idle epicure, than to be unfaithful ; if you rather choose to live in lust and sensuality, than to injure your neighbour in his goods, you have made no better a provision for the favour of God, than he, who rather chooses to rob a house than to rob a church.

For the abusing of our own nature is as great a disobedience against God, as the injuring of our neighbour ; and he, who wants piety towards

God, has done as much to damn himself, as he, who wants honesty towards men. Every argument therefore, which proves it necessary for all men, in all stations of life, to be truly honest, proves it equally necessary for all men, in all stations of life, to be truly holy and pious, and to do all things in such a manner, as is suitable to the glory of God.

Another argument to prove, that all orders of men are obliged to be thus holy and devout in the common use of their lives, in the use of every thing, which they enjoy, may be taken from our obligation to prayer.

It is granted, that prayer is a duty, which belongs to all states and conditions of men ; and, if we inquire into the reason of this, why no state of life is to be excused from prayer, we shall find it as good a reason, why every state of life is to be made a state of piety and holiness in all its parts.

Let us suppose a person to have appointed times for praising God with psalms and hymns, and to be strict in the observation of them. Let it be supposed also, that in his common life he is restless and uneasy, full of murmuring and complaints at every thing, never pleased but by chance, as his temper happens to carry him,

but murmuring and repining at the very seasons, and having something to dislike in every thing, which happens to him. Can you conceive any thing more absurd and unreasonable, than such a character as this ? Is such a one to be reckoned thankful to God, because he has forms of praise, which he offers to him ? Nay, is it not certain, that such forms of praise must be so far from being an acceptable devotion to God, that they must be abhorred, as an abomination ? The absurdity, which you see in this instance, is the same in any other part of our life ; if our common life have any contrariety to our prayers, it is the same abomination, as songs of thanksgiving in the mouths of murmurers.

Bended knees, whilst you are clothed with pride ; heavenly petitions, whilst you are hoarding up treasures on earth ; holy devotions, whilst you live in the follies of the world ; prayers of meekness and charity, whilst your heart is the seat of spite and resentment ; hours of prayer, whilst you give up days and years to idle diversions, impertinent visits, and foolish pleasures, are as absurd, unacceptable services to God, as forms of thanksgiving from a person, who lives in repinings and discontent.

So that, unless the common course of our lives be according to the common spirit of our prayers, our prayers are so far from being a real and sufficient degree of devotion, that they become an empty lip labour, or, what is worse, a notorious hypocrisy.

Seeing therefore we are to make the spirit and temper of our prayers the common spirit and temper of our lives, this may serve to convince us, that all orders of people are to labour and aspire after the same utmost perfection of the christian life. For, as all christians are to use the same holy and heavenly devotions, as they are all with the same earnestness to pray for the spirit of God ; so is it a sufficient proof, that all orders of people are, to the utmost of their power, to make their life agreeable to that one spirit, for which they are all to pray.

A soldier, or a tradesman, is not called to minister at the altar, nor preach the gospel ; but every soldier or tradesman is as much obliged to be devout, humble, holy, and heavenly minded in all the parts of his common life, as a clergyman is obliged to be zealous, faithful, and laborious in all parts of his profession ; all this for this one plain reason ; because all people are to pray for the same holiness, wisdom, and divine

tempers, and to make themselves as fit as they can for the same heaven.

The merchant is no longer to hoard up treasures upon earth ; the soldier is no longer to fight for glory ; the great scholar is no longer to pride himself in the depths of science ; but they must all with one spirit ‘ count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus.’

The fine lady must teach her eyes to weep, and be clothed with humility. The polite gentleman must exchange the gay thoughts of wit and fancy for a ‘ broken and a contrite heart.’ Servants must consider their service, as done unto God. Masters must consider their servants as their brethren in Christ, who are to be treated as their fellow-members of the mystical body of Christ.

Young ladies must either devote themselves to piety, prayer, self-denial, and all good works, in a virgin state of life ; or else marry to be holy, sober, and prudent in the care of a family, bringing up their children in piety, humility, and devotion, and abounding in all other good works, to the utmost of their state and capacity. They have no choice of any thing else, but must devote themselves to God in one of these

states. They may choose a married or a single life; but it is not left to their choice, whether they will make either state a state of holiness, humility, devotion, and all other duties of the christian life. It is no more left in their power, because they have fortunes, or are born of rich parents, to divide themselves between God and the world, or to take such pleasures, as their fortunes will afford them, than it is allowable for them to be sometimes chaste and modest and sometimes not.

They are not to consider, how much religion may secure them a fair character, nor how they may add devotion to an impertinent, vain, and giddy life; but must look into the spirit and temper of their prayers, into the nature and end of christianity, and then they will find, that whether married or unmarried, they have but one business upon their hands, to be wise and pious, and holy, not in little modes and forms of worship, but in the whole turn of their minds, in the whole form of all their behaviour, and in the daily course of their common life.

Young gentlemen must consider, what our blessed saviour said to the young man in the gospel; he bade him 'sell all, that he had, and give to the poor.' Though this text should

not oblige all people to sell all ; yet it certainly obliges all kinds of people to employ all their estates in such wise, and reasonable, and charitable ways, as may sufficiently show, that all, which they have, is devoted to God, and that no part of it is kept from the poor, to be spent in needless, vain and foolish expenses.

If therefore young gentlemen propose to themselves a life of pleasure and indulgence, if they spend their estates in high living, in luxury and intemperance, in state and equipage, in pleasures and diversions, in sports and gaming, and such like wanton gratifications of their foolish passions, they have as much reason to look upon themselves to be angels, as to be disciples of Christ.

Let them be assured, that it is the one only business of a christian gentleman to distinguish himself by good works, to be eminent in the most sublime virtues of the gospel, to bear with the ignorance and weakness of the vulgar, to be a friend and patron to all, who dwell about him, to live in the utmost heights of wisdom and holiness, and show through the whole course of his life a true religious greatness of mind. They must aspire after such a gentility, as they might have learnt from seeing the blessed Jesus,

and show no other spirit of a gentleman, but such as they might have gotten by living with the holy apostles. They must learn to love God with all their hearts, with all their souls, and with all their strength, and their neighbour as themselves ; and then they have all the greatness and distinction, which they can have here, and are fit for an eternal happiness in heaven hereafter.

Thus in all orders and conditions, either of men or women, this is the one common holiness, which is to be the common life of all christians.

CHAP. X.

Devotion affords us the greatest enjoyments of the present life.

SOME people will perhaps object, that all these rules of holy living unto God, in all which we do, are too great a restraint upon human life ; that it will be made too anxious a state, by thus introducing a regard to God in all our actions ; and that by depriving ourselves of so many seemingly innocent pleasures, we shall render our lives dull, uneasy, and melancholy.

To which it may be answered ;

First. That these rules are prescribed for, and will certainly procure, a quite contrary end. That instead of making our lives dull and melancholy, they will render them full of content and strong satisfactions. That by these rules we only change the childish satisfactions of our vain and sickly passions, for the solid enjoyments and real happiness of a sound mind.

Secondly. That as there is no foundation for comfort in the enjoyments of this life, but in the assurance, that a wise and good God governs the world ; so the more we find out God in every thing, the more we apply to him in every place, the more we look up to him in all our actions, the more we conform to his will, the more we act according to his wisdom, and imitate his goodness, by so much the more do we enjoy God, partake of the divine nature, and heighten and increase all, which is happy and comfortable in human life.

Thirdly. He, who is endeavouring to subdue and root out of his mind all those passions of pride, envy and ambition, which religion opposes, is doing more to make himself happy, even in this life, than he, who is contriving means to indulge them.

If religion forbid all instances of revenge without any exception, it is, because all revenge is of the nature of poison ; and, though we do not take so much, as to put an end to life ; yet, if we take any at all, it corrupts the whole mass of blood, and makes it difficult to be restored to our former health.

If religion command an universal charity, to love our neighbour as ourselves, to forgive and pray for all our enemies without any reserve ; it is, because all degrees of love are degrees of happiness, which strengthen and support the divine life of the soul, and are as necessary to its health and happiness, as proper food is necessary to the health and happiness of the body.

If religion have laws against ‘ laying up treasures upon earth,’ and command us to be content with food and raiment, it is, because every other use of the world is abusing it to our own vexation, and turning all its conveniences into snares and traps to destroy us. It is, because this plainness and simplicity of life secure us from the cares and pains of restless pride and envy, and make it easier to keep that strait road, which will carry us to eternal life.

If religion say, ‘ sell that thou hast, and give to the poor ;’ it is, because there is no other

natural nor reasonable use of our riches, no other way of making ourselves happier for them ; it is, because it is as strictly right to give others that, which we do not want ourselves, as it is right to use so much as our own wants require. For, if a man have more food, than his own nature requires, how base and unreasonable is it to invent foolish ways of wasting it, rather than let his fellow creatures have the same comfort from food, which he has had ? It is so far therefore from being a hard law of religion, to make this use of our riches, that a reasonable man would rejoice in that religion, which teaches him to be happier in that, which he gives away, than in that, which he keeps for himself ; which teaches him to make spare food and raiment be greater blessings to him, than that, which feeds and clothes his own body.

If religion require us sometimes to fast and deny our natural appetites, it is to lessen that struggle and war, which is in our nature ; it is to render our bodies fitter instruments of purity, and more obedient to the good motions of divine grace ; it is to dry up the springs of our passions, which war against the soul, to cool the flame of our blood, and render the mind more capable of divine meditations ; so that although these ab-

stинences give some pain to the body, yet they so lessen the power of bodily appetites and passions, and so increase our taste of spiritual joys, that even these severities of religion, when practised with discretion, add much to the comfortable enjoyment of our lives.

If religion call us to a life of watching and prayer, it is because we live amongst a croud of enemies, and are always in need of the assistance of God. If we are to confess and bewail our sins, it is, because such confessions relieve the mind, and restore it to ease; as burdens and weights taken off from the shoulders, relieve the body and make it easier to itself. If we are to be frequent and fervent in holy petitions, it is to keep us steady in the sight of our true good, and that we may never want the happiness of a lively faith, a joyful hope, and well grounded trust in God. If we are to pray often, it is that we may be often happy in such secret joys, as only prayers can give; in such communications of the divine presence, as will fill our minds with all the happiness, that beings not in heaven are capable of.

Were there any thing in the world more worth our care; were there any exercise of the mind, or any conversation with man, which turned

more to our advantage, than this intercourse with God, we should not be called to such a continuance in prayer. But if a man consider what it is, which he leaves, when he retires to devotion, he will find it no small happiness to be so often relieved from doing nothing, or nothing to the purpose ; from dull idleness, unprofitable labour, or vain conversation. If he consider, that all, which is in the world, and all, which is doing in it, is only for the body, and bodily enjoyments, he will have reason to rejoice at those hours of prayer, which carry him to higher consolations, which raise him above these poor concerns, which open to his mind a scene of greater things, and accustom his soul to the hope and expectation of them.

If religion command us to live wholly unto God, and do all to his glory, it is, because every other way is living wholly against ourselves, and will end in our own shame and confusion of face.

As every thing is dark, which God does not enlighten ; as every thing is senseless, which has not its share of knowledge from him ; as nothing lives, but by partaking of life from him ; as nothing exists, but because he commands it to be ; so there is no glory nor greatness, but what is the glory or greatness of God.

Would you see how happy they are, who live according to their own wills, who cannot submit to the dull and melancholy business of a life devoted unto God ? look at the man in the parable, to whom his lord had given one talent.

He could not bear the thoughts of using his talent according to the will of him, from whom he had it, and therefore he chose to make himself happier in a way of his own. ‘Lord,’ said he, ‘I know thee, that thou art an hard man, reaping, where thou hadst not sown, and gathering, where thou hast not strawed. And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth. Lo, there thou hast that is thine.’

His lord having convicted him out of his own mouth, dispatched him with this sentence ; ‘Cast the unprofitable servant into utter darkness ; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

Here you see how happy this man made himself by not acting wholly according to his lord’s will. It was, according to his own account, a happiness of murmuring and discontent. I know thee, says he, that thou wast an hard man ; it was an happiness of fears and apprehensions. I was, says he, afraid ; it was an happiness of vain labours and fruitless travails. I went,

says he, and hid thy talent ; and after having been awhile the sport of foolish passions, tormenting fears, and fruitless labours, he is rewarded with darkness, eternal weeping, and gnashing of teeth.

This is the happiness of all those, who look upon a strict and exalted piety, that is, a right use of their talent, to be a dull and melancholy state of life.

They may live awhile free from the restraints and directions of religion ; but, instead thereof, they must be under the absurd government of their passions. They must, like the man in the parable, live in murmurings and discontents, in fears and apprehensions. They may avoid the labour of doing good, of spending their time devoutly, of laying up treasures in heaven, of clothing the naked, of visiting the sick ; but then they must, like this man, have labours and pains in vain, which tend to no use nor advantage ; which do no good either to themselves or others. They must travail, and labour, and work, and dig to hide their talent in the earth. They must, like him, at their lord's coming, be convicted out of their own mouths, be accused by their own hearts, and have every thing, which they have said and thought of religion,

made to show the justice of their condemnation to eternal darkness, weeping, and gnashing of teeth.

This is the purchase, which they make, who avoid the strictness and perfection of religion, in order to live happily.

On the other hand, would you see a short description of the happiness of a life rightly employed, wholly devoted to God, you must look at the man in the parable, to whom his lord had given five talents. ‘Lord,’ said he, ‘thou deliveredst unto me five talents: behold, I have gained besides them five talents more. His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy lord.’

Here you see a life, which is wholly intent upon the improvement of the talents; which is devoted wholly unto God; is a state of happiness, prosperous labours, and glorious success. Here are not, as in the former case, any uneasy passions, murmurings, vain fears, and fruitless labours. The man is not toiling and digging in the earth for no end nor advantage; but his pious labours prosper in his hands; his happiness increases upon him; the blessing of five

becomes the blessing of ten talents ; and he is received with a ‘ Well done, good and faithful servant ; enter thou into the joy of thy lord.’

As the case of these men in the parable left nothing else to their choice, but either to be happy in using their gifts to the glory of the lord, or miserable by using them according to their own humours and fancies ; so the state of christianity leaves us no other choice.

All, which we have ; all, that we are ; all, which we enjoy, are only so many talents from God ; if we use them to the ends of a pious and holy life, our five talents will become ten, and our labours will carry us into the joy of our lord ; but if we abuse them to the gratification of our own passions, sacrificing the gifts of God to our own pride and vanity, we shall live here in vain labours and foolish anxieties, shunning religion as a melancholy thing ; accusing our lord as a hard master, and then fall into everlasting misery.

We may for awhile amuse ourselves with names, and sounds, and shadows of happiness ; we may talk of this or that greatness and dignity ; but if we desire real happiness, we have no other possible way to it, but by improving our talents, by so holily and piously using the

powers and faculties of men in this present state, that we may be happy and glorious in the powers and faculties of angels, in the world to come.

How ignorant therefore are they of the nature of religion, of the nature of man, and the nature of God, who think a life of strict piety and devotion to God to be a dull and uncomfortable state, when it is so plain and certain, that there is neither comfort nor joy to be found in anything else?

CHAP. XI.

The most regular life, which is not governed by devout devotion, shows its emptiness and misery.

IT is a very remarkable saying of our lord and saviour to his disciples in these words, ‘Blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear.’ They teach us two things; First, That the dulness and heaviness of men’s minds, with regard to spiritual matters, is so great, that it may justly be compared to the want of eyes and ears.

Secondly, That God has so filled every thing and every place with motives and arguments for a godly life, that they, who are but so blessed, so happy, as to use their eyes and their ears, must be affected with them.

Though this was in a more special manner the case of those, whose senses were witnesses of the life, and miracles, and doctrines of our blessed lord ; yet is it as truly the case of all christians at this time. For the reasons of religion, the calls to piety are so written and engraved upon every thing, and present themselves so strongly and so constantly to all our senses, in every thing which we meet, that they can be disregarded only by eyes, which see not, and ears, which hear not.

What greater motive to a religious life, than the vanity, the poorness of all worldly enjoyments ? Yet who can help seeing and feeling this every day of his life ?

What greater call to look towards God, than the pains, the sickness, the crosses, and vexations of this life ? Yet whose eyes and ears are not daily witnesses of them ?

What miracles could more strongly appeal to our senses, or what message from heaven speak

louder to us, than the daily dying and departure of our fellow creatures does ?

So that the one thing needful, or the great end of life, is not left to be discovered by fine reasoning and deep reflections ; but pressed upon us in the plainest manner by the experience of all our senses, by every thing, which we meet with in life.

Let us but intend to see and hear ; and then the whole world becomes a book of wisdom and instruction to us ; all, which is regular in the order of nature ; all, which is accidental in the course of things ; all the mistakes and disappointments, which happen to ourselves ; all the miseries and errors, which we see in other people, become so many plain lessons of advice to us ; teaching us with as much assurance, as an angel from heaven, that we can in no way raise ourselves to any true happiness, but by turning all our thoughts, our wishes, and endeavours after the happiness of another life.

It is this right use of the world, into which I would lead you, by directing you to turn your eyes upon every shape of human folly, that you may thence draw fresh arguments and motives of living to the best and greatest purposes of your creation.

If you would but carry this intention about you of profiting by the follies of the world, and of learning the greatness of religion from the littleness and vanity of every other way of life ; if, I say, you would but carry this intention in your mind, you would find every day, every place, and every person, a fresh proof of their wisdom, who choose to live wholly unto God. You would then often return home the wiser, the better, and the more strengthened in religion by every thing, which has fallen in your way.

Octavius is a learned, ingenious man, well versed in most parts of literature, and no stranger to any kingdom in Europe. The other day, being just recovered from a lingering fever, he took upon him to talk thus to his friends.

My glass, says he, is almost run out ; and your eyes see, how many marks of age and death I bear about me. But I plainly feel myself sinking away faster, than any standers by may imagine. I fully believe, that one year more will conclude my reckoning.

The attention of his friends was much raised by such a declaration, expecting to hear something truly excellent from so learned a man, who had but a year longer to live. When Octavius proceeded in this manner. For these reasons,

says he, my friends, I have left off all taverns. The wine of those places is not good enough for me in this decay of nature. I must now be nice in what I drink. I cannot pretend to do, as I have done ; and therefore am resolved to furnish my own cellar with a little of the very best ; though it cost me ever so much.

I must also tell you, my friends, that age forces a man to be wise in many other respects, and makes us change many of our opinions and practices. You know, how much I have liked a large acquaintance. I now condemn it as an error. Three or four cheerful, diverting companions, are all I now desire ; because I find, that, in my present infirmities, if I am left alone, or to grave company, I am not so easy to myself.

A few days after Octavius had made this declaration to his friends, he relapsed into his former illness, was committed to a nurse, who closed his eyes, before his fresh parcel of wine came in.

Young Eugenius, who was present at this discourse, went home a new man, with full resolutions of devoting himself wholly unto God.

I never, says Eugenius, was so deeply affected with the wisdom and importance of religion,

as when I saw how poorly and meanly the learned Octavius was to leave the world, through the want of it.

How often had I envied his great learning, his skill in languages, his knowledge of antiquity, his address, and fine manner of expressing himself upon all subjects ! But when I saw, how poorly it all ended, what was to be the last year of such a life, and how foolishly the master of all these accomplishments was then forced to talk, for want of being acquainted with the joys and expectations of piety ; I was thoroughly convinced, that there was nothing to be envied or desired, but a life of true piety ; nor any thing so poor and comfortless, as a death without it.

As the young Eugenius was thus edified and instructed in the present case ; so, if you are so happy, as to have any thing of his thoughtful temper, you will meet with a variety of instructions of this kind ; you will find, that arguments for the wisdom and happiness of a strict piety, offer themselves in all places, and appeal to all your senses in the plainest manner.

You will find, that all the world preaches to an attentive mind ; and that, if you have but

ears to hear, almost every thing you meet, teaches you some lesson of wisdom.

But, if to these admonitions and instructions, which we receive from our senses, from an experience of the state of human life ; if to these we add the lights of religion, those great truths, which the son of God has taught us ; it will be then as much past all doubt, that there is but one happiness for man, as that there is but one God.

For, since religion teaches us, that our souls are immortal, that piety and devotion will carry them to an eternal enjoyment of God ; and that carnal, worldly tempers will sink them into everlasting misery with damned spirits ; what gross nonsense and stupidity is it, to give the name of joy or happiness to any thing but that, which carries us to this joy and happiness in God ?

Negotius is a temperate, honest man. He served his time under a master of great trade ; but has by his own management made it a more considerable business, than ever it was before. For thirty years last past, he has written fifty or sixty letters in a week, and is busy in corresponding with all parts of Europe. The general good of trade seems to Negotius to be the general good of life. Whomsoever he admires, whatever he commends or condemns, either in church

or state, is admired, commended, or condemned, with some regard to trade.

As money is continually pouring in upon him, so he often lets it go in various kinds of expense and generosity, and sometimes in ways of charity.

Negotius is always ready to join in any publick contribution. If a purse is making at any place, where he happens to be, whether it be to buy a plate for a horse race, or to redeem a prisoner out of jail, you are always sure of having something from him.

He has given a fine ring of bells to a church in the country ; and there is much expectation, that he will some time or other make a more beautiful front to the market house, than has yet been seen in any place. For it is the generous spirit of Negotius to do nothing in a mean way.

If you ask, what it is, which has secured Negotius from all scandalous vices, it is the same thing, that has kept him from all strictness of devotion ; it is his great business. He has always had too many important things in his head, his thoughts have been too much employed, to suffer him to fall either into any courses of rakery, or to feel the necessity of an inward, solid piety.

For this reason he hears of the pleasures of debauchery, and the pleasures of piety, with the same indifference ; and has no more desire of living in the one, than in the other ; because neither of them consists with that turn of mind, and multiplicity of business, which are his happiness.

If Negotius were asked, what it is, which he drives at in life ? He would be as much at a loss for an answer, as if he were asked, what any other person is thinking of. For, though he always seems to himself to know what he is doing, and has many things in his head, which are the motives of his actions ; yet he cannot tell you of any one general end of life, which he has chosen with deliberation, as being truly worthy of all his labours and pains.

He has several confused notions in his head, which have been a long time there ; such as these, namely, that it is something great to have more business, than other people ; to have more dealings upon his hands, than a hundred of the same profession ; to grow continually richer and richer, and to raise an immense fortune, before he dies. The thing, which seems to give Negotius the greatest life and spirit, and to be most in his thoughts, is an expectation, that he

shall die richer, than any of his business ever did.

The generality of people, when they think of happiness, think upon Negotius, in whose life every instance of happiness is supposed to meet; sober, prudent, rich, prosperous, generous, and charitable.

But let it be supposed, that Negotius, when he first entered into business, happening to read the gospel with attention, and eyes open, found, that he had a much greater business upon his hands, than that, to which he had served an apprenticeship; that there were things, which belong to man, of much more importance, than all, which our eyes can see; so glorious, as to deserve all our thoughts; so dangerous, as to need all our care; and so certain, as never to deceive the faithful labourer.

Let it be supposed, that, from reading this book, he had discovered, that his soul was more to him, than his body; that it was better to grow in the virtues of the soul, than to have a large body, or a full purse; that it was better to fit for heaven, than to have variety of fine houses upon the earth; that it was better to secure an everlasting happiness, than to have plenty of things, which he cannot keep; better to live in

habits of humility, piety, devotion, charity, and self-denial, than to die unprepared for judgment; better to be most like our saviour, or some eminent saint, than to excel all the tradesmen in the world in business and bulk of fortune.

Had this been the christian spirit of Negotius, can any one say, that he had lost the true joy and happiness of life, by thus conforming to the spirit, and living up to the hopes of the gospel?

Can it be said, that a life made exemplary by such virtues as these, which keep heaven always in our sight, which both delight and exait the soul here, and prepare it for the presence of God hereafter, must be poor and dull, if compared to that of heaping up riches, which can neither stay with us, nor we with them?

It would be needless to multiply examples of this kind, to show you, how little is lost, and how much is gained, by introducing a strict and exact piety into every condition of human life.

CHAP. XII.

Prayer considered, as a branch of devotion.

HAVING in the foregoing chapters shown the necessity of a devout spirit, or habit of mind in every part of our common life, in the discharge of all our business, in the use of all the gifts of God ; I come now to consider that part of devotion, which relates to prayer.

Prayer is the nearest approach to God, and the highest enjoyment of him, of which we are capable in this life.

It is the noblest exercise of the soul, the most exalted use of our best faculties, and the highest imitation of the blessed inhabitants of heaven.

When our hearts are full of God, sending up holy desires to the throne of grace, we are then in our highest state, we are upon the utmost heights of human greatness ; we are not before kings and princes, but in the presence and audience of the lord of all the world ; and can be no higher, till death is swallowed up in glory.

When you begin your petitions, use such various expressions of the attributes of God, as

may make you more sensible of the greatness and power of the divine nature.

Begin therefore in words like these. O being of all beings, fountain of all light and glory, gracious father of men and angels, whose universal spirit is every where present, giving life, and light, and joy to all angels in heaven, and all creatures upon earth, &c.

For these representations of the divine attributes, which show in some degree the majesty and greatness of God, are an excellent means of raising our hearts into lively acts of worship and adoration.

In order to fill your prayers with excellent strains of devotion, it may be of use to you to observe this further rule.

When at any time, either in reading the scripture, or any book of piety, you meet with a passage, which more than ordinarily affects your mind, and seems, as it were, to give your heart a new motion towards God, you should try to turn it into the form of a petition, and then give it a place in your prayers.

By these means you would be often improving your prayers, and storing yourself with proper forms of making the desires of your heart known unto God.

At all the stated hours of prayer, it will be of great benefit to you to have something fixed and something at liberty in your devotions.

You should have some fixed subject, which is constantly to be the chief matter of your prayer at that particular time ; and yet have liberty to add such other petitions, as your condition may then require.

For instance ; as the morning is to you the beginning of a new life ; as God has then given you a new enjoyment of yourself, and a fresh entrance into the world ; it is highly proper, that your first devotions should be a praise and thanksgiving to God, as for a new creation ; and that you should offer and devote body and soul, all which you are, and all which you have, to his service and glory.

Receive therefore every day, as a resurrection from death, as a new enjoyment of life ; meet every rising sun with such sentiments of God's goodness, as if you had seen it, and all things, new created upon your account ; and, under the sense of so great a blessing, let your joyful heart praise and magnify so good and glorious a creator.

Let therefore praise and thanksgiving, and oblation of yourself unto God, be always the

fixed and certain subject of your first prayers in the morning ; and then take the liberty of adding such other devotions, as the accidental difference of your state, or the accidental difference of your heart, shall then make most needful and expedient for you.

For one of the greatest benefits of private devotion consists in rightly adapting our prayers to these two conditions, the difference of our state, and the difference of our heart.

By the difference of our state is meant the difference of our external state or condition, as of sickness, health, pains, losses, disappointments, troubles, particular mercies, or judgments from God, all sorts of kindnesses, injuries, or reproaches from other people.

As these are great parts of our state of life, as they make a great difference in it by continual changing ; so our devotion will be made doubly beneficial to us, when it watches to receive and sanctify all these changes of our state, and turns them all into so many occasions of a more particular application to God, of such thanksgiving, such resignation, such petitions, as our present state more especially requires.

He, who makes every change in his state a reason of presenting unto God some particular

petitions suitable to that change, will soon find, that he has taken an excellent mean, not only of praying with fervour, but of living, as he prays.

The next condition, to which we are always to adapt some part of our prayers, is the difference of our hearts ; by which is meant the different state of the tempers of our hearts, as of love, joy, peace, tranquillity, dulness of spirit, anxiety, discontent, motions of envy and ambition, dark and disconsolate thoughts, resentments, fretfulness, and peevish tempers.

As these tempers will have their succession more or less, even in pious minds ; so we should constantly make the present state of our heart the reason of some particular application to God.

If we are in the delightful calm of sweet and easy passions, of love and joy in God, we should then offer the grateful tribute of thanksgiving to God, for the possession of so much happiness, thankfully owning and acknowledging him as the bountiful giver of it all.

If, on the other hand, we feel ourselves laden with heavy passions, with dulness of spirit, anxiety, and uneasiness, we must then look up to God in acts of humility, confessing our unworthiness, opening our troubles to him, be-

seeching him, in his good time, to lessen the weight of our infirmities, and to deliver us from such passions, as oppose the purity and perfection of our souls.

By thus watching, and attending to the present state of our hearts, and suiting some of our petitions exactly to their wants, we shall not only be well acquainted with the disorders of our souls, but also be well exercised in the method of curing them.

By this prudent and wise application of our prayers, we shall get all the relief from them, which is possible ; and the very changeableness of our hearts will prove a mean of exercising a greater variety of holy tempers.

It is for want of considering devotion in this light, as something, which is to be nursed and cherished with care ; as something, which is to be made part of our business ; which is to be improved with care and contrivance, by art and method, and a diligent use of the best helps ; it is for want of considering it in this light, that so many people are so little benefitted by it, and live and die strangers to that spirit of devotion, which, by a prudent use of proper means, they might have enjoyed in a high degree.

To conclude this chapter. Devotion is nothing else but right apprehensions and right affections towards God.

All practices therefore, which heighten and improve our true apprehensions of God, all ways of life, which tend to nourish, raise, and fix our affections upon him, are to be reckoned so many helps and means to fill us with devotion.

As prayer is the proper fuel of this holy flame, so we must use all our care and contrivance to give prayer its full power ; as by alms, self-denial, frequent retirements, and holy readings, composing forms for ourselves, or using the best we can get, adding length of time, and observing hours of prayer ; changing, improving, and suiting our devotions to the condition of our lives, and the state of our hearts.

Those, who have most leisure, seem more especially called to a more eminent observance of these holy rules of a devout life. They, who by the necessity of their state, and not through their own choice, have but little time to employ thus, must make the best use of the little they have.

This is the certain way of making devotion produce a devout life.

CHAP. XIII.

Recommending thanksgiving, as a subject of devotion.

THERE is no state of mind so holy, so excellent, and so truly perfect, as that of thankfulness to God; and consequently nothing is of more importance in religion, than that, which exercises and improves this habit of mind.

A dull, uneasy, complaining spirit, which is sometimes the spirit of those, who seem careful of religion, is yet of all tempers the most contrary to religion; it disowns that God, which it pretends to adore. For he sufficiently disowns God, who does not adore him, as a being of infinite goodness.

If a man do not believe, that all the world is as God's family, where nothing happens by chance, but all is guided and directed by the care and providence of a being, who is all love and goodness to all his creatures; if a man do not believe this from his heart, he cannot be said truly to believe in God. Yet he, who has this faith, has faith enough to overcome the world, and always be thankful to God. For

he, who believes, that every thing happens to him for the best, cannot possibly complain for the want of something, which is better.

If therefore you live in murmurings and complaints, accusing all the accidents of life, it is not, because you are a weak, infirm creature, but it is, because you want the first principle of religion, a right belief in God. For, as thankfulness is an express acknowledgment of the goodness of God towards you, so repinings and complaints are as plain accusations of God's want of the goodness of God towards you.

On the other hand, would you know, who is the greatest saint in the world? It is not he, who prays most, or fasts most; it is not he, who gives most alms, or is most eminent for temperance, chastity, or justice; but it is he, who is always thankful to God; who wills every thing, that God willeth; who receives every thing, as an instance of God's goodness, and has a heart always ready to praise God for it.

All prayer and devotions, fastings and repentance, meditation and retirement, all sacraments and ordinances are but so many means to render the soul thus divine and conformable to the will of God, and to fill it with thankfulness and praise for every thing, which comes

from God. This is the perfection of all virtues ; and all virtues, which do not tend to it, nor proceed from it, are but so many false ornaments of a soul not converted to God.

If any one would tell you the shortest, surest way to all happiness, and all perfection, he must tell you to make it a rule to yourself to thank and praise God for every thing, which happens to you. For it is certain, that, whatever seeming calamity happens to you, if you thank and praise God for it, you turn it into a blessing.

Could you work miracles, you could not do more for yourself, than by this thankful spirit ; for it heals with a word speaking, and turns all, which it touches, into happiness.

If therefore you would be so true to your eternal interest, as to propose this thankfulness as the end of all your religion ; if you would but settle it in your mind, that this was the state, at which you were to aim by all your devotions, you would then have something plain and visible to walk by in all your actions, you would then easily see the effect of your virtues, and might safely judge of your improvement in piety. For so far as you renounce all selfish tempers, and motions of your own will, and seek for no other happiness, but in the thankful re-

ception of every thing, which happens to you, so far you may be safely reckoned to have advanced in piety.

Although this be the highest temper, at which you can aim ; though it be the noblest sacrifice, that the greatest saints can offer unto God ; yet it is not tied to any time, nor place, nor great occasion ; but is always in your power, and may be the exercise of every day. For the common events of every day are sufficient to discover and exercise this temper, and may plainly show you, how far you are governed in all your actions by this thankful spirit.

For this reason I exhort you to this method in your devotion, that every day may be made a day of thanksgiving, and that the spirit of murmur and discontent may be unable to enter into the heart, which is so often employed in praising God.

CHAP. XIV.

Recommending humility, as a subject of devotion.

I HAVE, in the last chapter, laid before you the excellency of praise and thanksgiving.

I shall now recommend humility to you, as highly proper to be made the constant subject of your devotions.

Humility is so essential to the right state of our souls, that there is no pretending to a reasonable or pious life without it. We may as well think to see without eyes, or live without breath, as to live in the spirit of religion without the spirit of humility.

Although it is thus the soul and essence of all religious duties; yet is it, generally speaking, the least understood, the least regarded, the least intended, the least desired, and sought after, of all other virtues amongst all sorts of christians.

No people have more occasion to be afraid of the approaches of pride, than those, who have made some advances in a pious life. For pride can grow as well upon our virtues, as our vices, and steals upon us on all occasions.

Every good thought, which we have, every good action, we do, lays us open to pride, and exposes us to the assaults of vanity and self-satisfaction.

It is not only the duty of our persons, the gifts of fortune, our natural talents, and the distinctions of life; but even our devotions and

alms, our fastings and humiliations expose us to fresh and strong temptations of this evil spirit.

Humility does not consist in having a worse opinion of ourselves, than we deserve, nor in abasing ourselves lower, than we really are. But, as all virtue is founded in truth, so humility is founded on a true and just sense of our weakness, misery, and sin. He, who rightly feels and lives in this sense of his condition, lives in humility.

The weakness of our state appears from our inability to do any thing as of ourselves. We are indeed active beings ; but can only act by a power, which is every moment lent us from God.

This is the dependent, helpless poverty of our state ; which is a great reason for humility. For, since we neither are, nor can do any thing of ourselves, to be proud of any thing, which we are, or of any thing, which we can do, and to ascribe glory to ourselves for these things, as our own ornaments, has the guilt both of stealing and lying. It has the guilt of stealing, as it gives to ourselves those things, which belong to God alone. It has the guilt of lying, as it is denying the truth of our state, and pretending to be something, which we are not.

Secondly. Another argument for humility is founded in the misery of our condition.

The misery of our condition appears in this, that we use these borrowed powers of our nature to the torment and vexation of ourselves and our fellow creatures.

God almighty has intrusted us with the use of reason, and we use it to the disorder and corruption of our nature. We reason ourselves into all kinds of folly and misery, and make our lives the sport of foolish and extravagant passions ; seeking after imaginary happiness in all kinds of shapes, creating to ourselves a thousand wants, amusing our hearts with false hopes and fears, using the world worse than irrational animals ; envying, vexing, and tormenting one another with restless passions and unreasonable contentions.

Let any man but look back upon his own life, and see, what use he has made of his reason, how little he has consulted it, and how less he has followed it ; what foolish passions, what vain thoughts, what needless labours, what extravagant projects, have taken up the greatest part of his life ; how foolish he has been in his words and conversation ; how seldom he has done well with judgment, and how often he has

been kept from doing ill by accident ; how seldom he has been able to please himself, and how often he has displeased others ; how often he has changed his counsels, hated what he loved, and loved what he hated ; how often he has been enraged and transported at trifles, pleased and displeased with the very same things, and constantly changing from one vanity to another. Let a man but take this view of his own life, and he will see reason enough to confess, that pride was not made for man.

Thirdly. If to this we add the shame and guilt of sin, we shall find a still greater reason for humility.

No creature, who had lived in innocence, would have thereby any pretence for self-honour and esteem ; because, as a creature, all which it is, or has, or does, is from God, and therefore the honour of all, which belongs to it, is due to God only.

But, if a creature, who is a sinner, and under the displeasure of the great governour of all the world, and deserving nothing from him but pains and punishments for the shameful abuse of his powers ; if such a creature pretend to self-glory for any thing, which he is, or does, he can only be said to glory in his shame.

When you have by such general reflections as these convinced your mind of the reasonableness of humility, you must not content yourself with this, as if you were therefore humble, because your mind acknowledges the reasonableness of humility, and declares against pride. But you must immediately enter yourself into the practice of this virtue, like a young beginner, who has all of it to learn, who can learn but little at a time, and with great difficulty. You must consider, that you have not only this virtue to learn, but that you must be content to proceed as a learner in it all your time, endeavouring after greater degrees of it, and practising every day acts of humility, as you every day practise acts of devotion.

CHAP. XV.

Recommending universal love, as a subject of devotion.

I NOW proceed to consider the nature and necessity of universal love. You are here called to intercession, as the most proper exercise to raise and preserve that love.

By intercession is meant a praying to God, and interceding with him for our fellow-creatures.

Our blessed lord has recommended his love to us, as the pattern and example of our love to one another. As therefore he is continually making intercession for us all, so ought we to intercede and pray for one another.

'A new commandment,' says he, 'I give unto you, that ye love one another, as I have loved you. By this shall all men know, that ye are my disciples, if ye love one another.'

The newness of this precept did not consist in this, that men were commanded to love one another ; for this was an old precept, both of the law of Moses and of nature. But it was new in this respect, that it was to imitate a new, and till then an unheard of example of love ; it was to love one another, as Christ had loved us.

If men are to know, that we are disciples of Christ by thus loving one another according to his new example of love ; then it is certain, that if we are void of this love, we make it as plainly known unto men, that we are none of his disciples.

There is no principle of the heart, which is more acceptable to God, than a universal fer-

vent love to all mankind, wishing and praying for their happiness ; because there is no principle of the heart, which makes us more like God, who is love and goodness itself, and who created all things for their enjoyment and happiness.

The greatest idea, which we can frame of God, is, when we conceive him to be a being of infinite love and goodness, using an infinite wisdom and power for the common good and happiness of all his creatures.

The highest notion therefore, which we can form of man, is, when we conceive him as like to God in this respect, as he can be, using all his finite faculties, whether of wisdom, power, or prayers, for the common good of all his fellow-creatures ; heartily desiring, they may have all the happiness, they are capable of, and as many benefits and assistances from him, as his state and condition in the world will permit him to give them.

On the other hand, what a baseness and iniquity are there in all instances of hatred, envy, spite, and ill-will ; if we consider, that every instance of them is so far acting in opposition to God, and intending mischief and harm to those creatures, which God favours, and protects, and preserves, in order to their happiness ?

An ill-natured man amongst God's creatures is the most perverse creature in the world, acting contrary to that love, by which himself subsists, and which alone gives subsistence to all that variety of beings, that enjoy life in any part of the creation.

' Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, even so do unto them.'

Though this is a doctrine of strict justice, yet it is only a universal love, which can comply with it. For, as love is the measure of our acting towards ourselves, so we can never act in the same manner towards other people, till we look upon them with that love, with which we look upon ourselves.

Acts of love, which proceed not from a principle of universal love, are but like acts of justice, which proceed from a heart not disposed to universal justice. A love, which is not universal, may indeed have affection, but it has nothing of righteousness nor piety in it ; it is but humour, and temper, or interest, or such a love as publicans and heathens practise.

All particular envies and spites are as plain departures from the spirit of christianity, as any particular acts of injustice. For it is as much a law of Christ to treat every body as your neigh-

bou, and to love your neighbour as yourself, as it is a law of christianity to abstain from theft.

The noblest motive to this universal tenderness and affection is founded in this doctrine, ‘ God is love, and he, that dwelleth in him, dwelleth in God.’

Who therefore, whose heart has any tendency towards God, would not aspire after this divine temper, which so changes and exalts our nature into a union with him ?

How should we rejoice in the exercise and practice of this love, which, so often as we feel it, is so often an assurance to us, that God is in us, that we act according to his spirit, who is love itself ? But we must observe, that love has then only this mighty power of uniting us to God, when it is so pure and universal, as to imitate that love, which God bears to all his creatures.

God wills the happiness of all beings, though it is no happiness to himself ; therefore we must desire the happiness of all beings, though no happiness comes to us from it.

God equally delights in the perfections of all his creatures ; therefore we should rejoice in those perfections, wherever we see them, and be as glad to have other people perfect, as ourselves.

As God forgives all, and gives grace to all, so we should forgive all those injuries and affronts, which we receive from others, and do all the good we can to them.

God almighty, besides his own great example of love, which ought to draw all his creatures after it, has so provided for us, and made our happiness so common to us all, that we have no occasion to envy or hate one another. For we cannot stand in one another's way, nor, by enjoying any particular good, keep another from his full share of it.

As we cannot be happy, but in the enjoyment of God, so we cannot rival, nor rob one another of this happiness.

As to other things, the enjoyments and prosperities of this life, they are so little in themselves, so foreign to our happiness, and, generally speaking, so contrary to that, which they appear to be, that they are no foundation for envy, or spite, or hatred.

How silly would it be to envy a man, who was drinking poison out of a golden cup. Yet, who can say, that he is acting wiser than thus, when he is envying any instance of worldly greatness ?

How many saints has adversity sent to heaven ? How many poor sinners has prosperity plunged into everlasting misery ? A man seems then to be in the most glorious state, when he has conquered, disgraced, and humbled his enemy ; though it may be, that same conquest has saved his adversary and undone himself.

This man had perhaps never been debauched, but for his fortune and advancement ; that had never been pious, but through his poverty and disgrace.

She, who is envied for her beauty, may perchance owe all her misery to it ; and another may be forever happy, for having no admirers of her person.

One man succeeds in every thing, and so loses all ; another meets with nothing but crosses and disappointments, and thereby gains more than all the world is worth.

How despised was the poor preacher, St. Paul, when he was beaten with rods ! Yet how strangely was the world mistaken in their judgment ! How much to be envied was St. Paul ! How much to be pitied was Alexander !

How envied was Alexander, when conquering the world, he built towns, set up his statues, and left marks of his glory in so many kingdoms !

These few reflections sufficiently show us, that the different conditions of this life have nothing in them to excite our uneasy passions, nothing, which can reasonably interrupt our love and affection to one another.

To proceed now to another motive to this universal love.

Our power of doing external acts of love and goodness is often very narrow and restrained. There are, it may be, but few people, to whom we can contribute any worldly relief.

But, though our outward means of doing good are often thus limited, yet, if our hearts are but full of love and goodness, we get, as it were, an infinite power; because God will attribute to us those good works, those acts of love and tender charities, which we sincerely desired, and would gladly have performed, had it been in our power.

You cannot heal all the sick, relieve all the poor; you cannot comfort all in distress, nor be a father to all the fatherless. You cannot, it may be, deliver many from their misfortunes, nor teach them to find comfort in God.

But, if there be a love and tenderness in your heart, which delights in these good works, and excites you to do all, that you can; if your love

have no bounds, but you continually wish and pray for the relief and happiness of all, in distress, you will be received by God, as a benefactor to those, who have had nothing from you but your good will and tender affections.

You cannot build hospitals for the incurable ; but if you join in your heart with those, who do, and thank God for their pious designs ; if you are a friend to these great friends of mankind, and rejoice in their eminent virtues, you will be received by God as a sharer of such good works, as though they had none of your hands, yet had all your heart.

This consideration is surely sufficient to make us look to, and watch over our hearts with all diligence ; to study the improvement of our inward tempers, and aspire after every height and perfection of a loving, charitable, and benevolent mind.

On the other hand, we may hence learn the great evil and mischief of all wrong turns of mind, of envy, spite, hatred, and ill-will. For, if the goodness of our hearts will entitle us to the reward of good actions, which we never performed ; it is certain, that the badness of our hearts, our envy, ill-nature, and hatred, will

bring us under the guilt of actions which we have never committed.

Since therefore our hearts, which are always naked and open to the eyes of God, give such an exceeding extent and increase either to our virtues or vices, it is our best and greatest business to govern the motions of our hearts, to watch, correct, and improve the inward state of our souls.

There is nothing, which so much exalts our souls, as this heavenly love ; it cleanses and purifies like a holy fire, and all ill tempers fall away before it. It makes room for all virtues, and carries them to their greatest height. Every thing, which is good and holy, grows out of it, and it becomes a continual source of all holy desires and pious practices. By love I do not mean any natural tenderness, which is more or less in people, according to their constitutions ; but I mean a larger principle of the soul, founded in reason and piety, which makes us tender, kind, and benevolent to all our fellow-creatures, as creatures of God, and for his sake.

It is this love, which loves all things in God, as his creatures, as the images of his power, as the creatures of his goodness, as parts of his family, as members of his society, which be-

comes a holy principle of all great and good actions.

The love therefore of our neighbour is only a branch of our love to God. For when we love God with all our hearts, and with all our souls, and with all our strength, we shall necessarily love those beings, who are so nearly related to God, who have every thing from him, and are created by him, to be objects of his own eternal love. If I hate or despise any one man in the world, I hate something, which God cannot hate, and despise that, which he loves.

Can I think, that I love God with all my heart, whilst I hate that, which belongs only to God, which has no other master but him, which bears his image, is part of his family, and exists only by the continuance of his love towards it ?

It was the impossibility of this, which made St. John say, ‘ That if any man saith, he loveth God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar.’

These reasons sufficiently show us, that no love is holy or religious, till it become universal.

We are to love our neighbour, that is, all mankind, not because they are wise, holy, virtuous, or well-behaved ; for all mankind neither ever were, nor ever will be so ; therefore it is

certain, that the reason of our being obliged to love them cannot be founded in their virtue.

If their virtue or goodness, were the reason of our being obliged to love people, we should have no rule to proceed ; because, though some people's virtues or vices are very notorious, yet, generally speaking, we are but very ill judges of the virtue and merit of other people.

We are sure, that the virtue or merit of persons is not the reason of our being obliged to love them ; because we are commanded to pay the highest instances of love to our worst enemies ; we are to love, and bless, and pray for those, who most injuriously treat us. This therefore is demonstration, that the merit of persons is not the reason, on which our obligation to love them is founded.

If the want of a true and exact charity be so great a want, that, as St. Paul says, it renders our greatest virtues but empty sounds, and tinkling cymbals, how highly does it concern us to study every art, and practise every method of raising our souls to this state of charity ? It is for this reason, that you are here desired not to let a day pass without a full and solemn supplication to God for all the instances of universal love and benevolence to mankind ; such daily, constant

devotion being the only likely means of preserving you in such a state of love, as is necessary to prove you to be a true follower of Jesus Christ.

CHAP. XVI.

On the necessity and benefit of intercession, considered as a branch of universal love.

THAT intercession is a great and necessary part of christian devotion is very evident from scripture.

The first followers of Christ seem to support all their love, and to maintain all their intercourse and correspondence by mutual prayers for one another.

St. Paul, whether he write to churches, or particular persons, shows his intercession to be perpetual for them, that they are the constant subject of his prayers.

Thus to the Philippians, ‘I thank my God upon every remembrance of you ; always in every prayer of mine for you all, making request with joy.’ Here we see not only a continual intercession, but performed with so much gladness, as shows, that it was an exercise of love, in which he highly rejoiced.

His devotion had also the same care for particular persons ; as appears by the following passage. ‘ I thank my God, whom I serve from my fore-fathers, with a pure conscience, that, without ceasing, I have remembrance of thee in my prayers night and day.’ How holy an acquaintance and friendship was this ! How worthy of persons, who were raised above the world, and related to one another, as new members of a kingdom of heaven ! and so good & true

Apostles and great saints did not only thus benefit and bless particular churches and private persons ; but they themselves also received grace from God by the prayers of others. Thus says St. Paul to the Corinthians. ‘ You also helping together by prayer for us, that for the gift bestowed upon us by the means of many persons, thanks may be given by many on our behalf.’

This was the ancient friendship of christians, uniting and cementing their hearts, not by wordly considerations nor human passions, but by the mutual communication of spiritual blessings, by prayers and thanksgivings to God for one another.

It was this holy intercession, which raised christians to such a state of mutual love, as far exceeded all, which had been praised and ad-

mired in human friendship. When the same spirit of intercession is again in the world, when christianity has the same power over the hearts of people, which it then had, this holy friendship will be again in fashion, and christians will be again the wonder of the world for that exceeding love, which they will bear to one another.

For a frequent intercession with God, earnestly beseeching him to forgive the sins of all mankind, to bless them with his providence, enlighten them with his spirit, and bring them to everlasting happiness, is the divinest exercise, in which the heart of man can be engaged.

Be daily therefore on your knees in a solemn deliberate performance of this devotion, praying for others in such forms, with such length, importunity and earnestness, as you use for yourself ; and you will find all little, ill-natured passions die away, your heart grow great and generous, delighting in the common happiness of others, as you used only to delight in your own.

For he, who daily prays to God, that all men may be happy in heaven, takes the likeliest way to make him wish for, and delight in their happiness on earth. It is hardly possible for you to beseech and entreat God to make any one

happy in the highest enjoyments of his glory to all eternity, and yet be troubled to see him enjoy the much smaller gifts of God in this short and low state of human life.

For how strange and unnatural would it be to pray to God to grant health and a longer life to a sick man, and at the same time to envy him the poor pleasures of agreeable medicines ?

Yet this would be no more strange, nor unnatural, than to pray to God, that your neighbour may enjoy the highest degrees of mercy and favour, and yet at the same time envy him the little credit and figure he has amongst his fellow-creatures.

When therefore you have once habituated your heart to a serious performance of this holy intercession, you have done a great deal to render it incapable of spite and envy, and to make it naturally delight in the happiness of all mankind.

This is the natural effect of a general intercession for all mankind. But the greatest benefits of it are then received, when it descends to such particular instances, as our state and condition in life more particularly require of us.

Though we are to treat all mankind as neighbours and brethren, as occasion offers, yet, as we

can live in the actual society of a few only, and are by our state and condition more particularly related to some than others ; so when our intercession is made an exercise of love and care for those, amongst whom our lot is fallen, or for those, who belong to a nearer relation, it then becomes the greatest benefit to ourselves, and produces its best effects in our own hearts.

If therefore you should always change and alter your intercessions, according as the needs and necessities of your neighbours or acquaintance seem to require ; beseeching God to deliver them from such or such particular evils, or to grant them this or that particular gift, or blessing, such intercessions, besides the great charity of them, would have a mighty effect upon your own heart, as disposing you to every other good office, and to the exercise of every other virtue towards such persons, as have so often a place in your prayers.

This would make it pleasant to you to be courteous, civil, and condescending to all about you ; and make you unable to say, or do a rude, or hard thing to those, for whom you had used yourself to be so kind and compassionate in your prayers.

For there is nothing, which makes us love a man so much, as praying for him ; and when you can once do this sincerely for any man, you have fitted your soul for the performance of every thing, which is kind and civil towards him.

If masters, for instance, were thus to remember their servants in their prayers, beseeching God to bless them, and suiting their petitions to the particular wants and necessities of their servants ; letting no day pass, without a full performance of this part of devotion ; the benefit would be as great to themselves, as to their servants.

No way is so likely as this, to inspire them with a true sense of that power, which they have in their hands, to make them delight in doing good, and become exemplary in all the parts of a wise and good master.

The presenting of their servants so often before God, as equally related to God, and entitled to the same expectations of heaven, as themselves, would naturally incline them to treat them, not only with such humanity, as became fellow creatures, but with such tenderness, care, and generosity, as became fellow heirs of the same glory. This devotion would make mas-

ters inclined to every thing, which was good towards their servants, be watchful of their behaviour, and as ready to require of them an exact observance of the duties of christianity, as of the duties of their service.

How natural would it be for such a master to perform every part of family devotion ; to have constant prayers ; to excuse no one's absence from them ; to have the scriptures, and books of piety often read amongst his servants ; to take all opportunities of instructing them, of raising their minds to God, and teaching them to do all their business, as a service to God, and upon the hopes and expectations of another life ?

How natural would it be for such a one to pity their weakness and ignorance, to bear with the dulness of their understandings, or the perverseness of their tempers, to reprove them with tenderness, exhort them with affection, as hoping, that God would hear his prayers for them ?

How impossible would it be for a master, who thus interceded with God for his servants, to use any unkind threatenings towards them, to damn and curse them as dogs and scoundrels, and treat them only as the dregs of creation ?

This devotion would give them another spirit, and make them consider how to make proper returns of care, kindness, and protection to those, who had spent their strength and time in service and attendance upon them.

If parents should thus make themselves advocates and intercessors with God for their children, constantly applying to heaven in behalf of them, nothing would be more likely, not only to bless their children, but also to form and dispose their own minds to the performance of every thing, which was excellent and praiseworthy.

I do not suppose, but that the generality of parents remember their children in their prayers, and call upon God to bless them. But the thing here intended is not a general remembrance of them, but a regular method of recommending all their particular needs and necessities unto God ; and of praying for every such particular grace and virtue for them, as their state and condition of life shall seem to require.

The state of parents is a holy state, in some degree like that of the priesthood, and calls upon them to bless their children with their prayers and sacrifices to God. Thus it was, that holy Job watched over, and blessed his children, he ‘sanctified them, he rose up early in the morn-

ing, and offered burnt offerings, according to the number of them all.'

If parents therefore, considering themselves in this light, should be daily calling upon God in a solemn, deliberate manner, altering and extending their intercessions, as the state and growth of their children required, such devotion would have a mighty influence upon the rest of their lives ; it would make them very circumspect in the government of themselves ; prudent and careful of every thing they said or did, lest their example should hinder that, which they so constantly desired in their prayers.

If a father were daily making particular prayers to God, that he would please to inspire his children with true piety, great humility, and strict temperance; what could be more likely to make the father himself become exemplary in these virtues ? How naturally would he grow ashamed of wanting such virtues, as he thought necessary for his children ? So that his prayers for their piety would be a certain mean of exalting his own to its greatest height.

If a father thus considered himself as an intercessor with God for his children, to bless them with his prayers, what more likely means to make him aspire after every degree of holiness,

ness, that he might thereby be fitter to obtain blessings from heaven for them ? How would such thoughts make him avoid every thing, which was sinful and displeasing to God, lest, when he prayed for his children, God should reject his prayers ?

How tenderly, how religiously would such a father converse with his children, whom he considered as his little spiritual flock, whose virtues he was to form by his example, encourage by his authority, nourish by his counsel, and prosper by his prayers to God for them ?

How fearful would he be of all greedy and unjust ways of raising their fortune, of bringing them up in pride and indulgence, or of making them too fond of the world, lest he should thereby render them incapable of those graces, which he was so often beseeching God to grant them ?

These being the plain, natural, happy effects of this intercession, all parents, I hope, who have the real welfare of their children at heart, who desire to be their true friends and benefactors, and to live amongst them in the spirit of wisdom and piety, will not neglect so great a mean both of raising their own virtue, and doing an eternal good to those, who are so near and dear to them, by the strongest ties of nature.

Lastly. If all people, when they feel the first approaches of resentment, envy, or contempt, towards others ; or if in all little disagreements, and misunderstandings whatever, they should, instead of indulging their minds with little low reflections, have recourse at such times to a more particular and extraordinary intercession with God for such persons, as had raised their envy, resentment, or discontent ; this would be a certain way to prevent the growth of all uncharitable tempers.

If you were also to form your prayer, or intercession at that time, to the greatest degree of contrariety to that temper, which you were then in, it would be an excellent mean of raising your heart to the greatest state of perfection.

As, for instance, when at any time you find in your heart motions of envy towards any person, whether on account of his riches, power, reputation, learning, or advancement, if you should immediately betake yourself at that time to prayers, and pray to God to bless and prosper him in that very thing, which raised your envy ; if you should express and repeat your petitions in the strongest terms, beseeching God to grant him all the happiness from the enjoy-

ment of it, which can possibly be received, you would soon find it to be the best antidote in the world, to expel the venom of that poisonous passion.

CHAP. XVII.

Recommending resignation, as a subject of devotion.

YOU are next desired to consider the necessity of resignation and conformity to the will of God, and to make this great virtue a subject of your prayers.

There is nothing wise, or holy, or just, but the great will of God. This is as strictly true in the most rigid sense, as to say, that nothing is infinite and eternal but God.

No beings therefore, whether in heaven or on earth, can be wise, or holy, or just, but so far, as they conform to this will of God. It is conformity to this will, which gives virtue and perfection to the highest services of angels in heaven ; and it is conformity to the same will, which makes the ordinary actions of men on earth become an acceptable service unto God.

The whole nature of virtue consists in conforming to, and the whole nature of vice in declining from, the will of God. All God's creatures are created to fulfil his will. The sun and moon obey his will by the necessity of their nature. Angels conform to his will by the perfection of their nature. If therefore you would show yourself not to be a rebel and apostate from the order of the creation, you must act like beings both above and below you ; it must be the great desire of your soul, that God's will may be done by you on earth, as it is done in heaven. It must be the settled purpose and intention of your heart to will nothing, design nothing, do nothing, but so far, as you have reason to believe, that it is the will of God, that you should so desire, design, and do.

It is as just and necessary to live in this state of heart, to think thus of God and yourself, as to think, that you have any dependence upon him. It is as great a rebellion against God to think, that your will may ever differ from his, as to think, that you have not received the power of willing from him.

You are therefore to consider yourself as a being, that has no other business in the world, but to be that, which God requires you to be ;

to have no tempers, no rules of your own, to seek no selfish designs nor selfish ends, but to fill some place, and act some part in strict conformity, and thankful resignation to the divine pleasure.

To think, that you are your own, or at your own disposal, is as absurd, as to think, that you created, and can preserve yourself. It is as plain and necessary a first principle, to believe you are thus God's, that you thus belong to him, and are to act and suffer all in a thankful resignation to his pleasure, as to believe, that in him you live, and move, and have your being.

Resignation to the divine will signifies a cheerful approbation and thankful acceptance of every thing, which comes from God. It is not enough patiently to submit ; but we must thankfully receive, and fully approve of every thing, which by the order of God's providence happens to us. For there is no reason, why we should be patient, but what is as good and strong a reason, why we should be thankful. If we were under the hands of a wise and good physician, who could not mistake, nor do any thing to us, but what certainly tended to our benefit ; it would not be enough to be patient, and abstain from murmuring against such a physician ; but

it would be as great a breach of duty and gratitude to him, not to be pleased and thankful for what he did, as it would be to murmur at him.

This is our true state with relation to God ; we cannot be said so much as to believe in him, unless we believe him to be of infinite wisdom. Every argument therefore for patience under his disposal of us is as strong an argument for approbation and thankfulness for every thing, which he does to us. There needs no more to dispose us to this gratitude towards God, than a full belief in him, that he is this being of infinite wisdom, love, and goodness.

Do but assent to this truth, in the same manner, as you assent to things, of which you have no doubt ; and then you will cheerfully approve of every thing, which God has already approved for you.

For as you cannot possibly be pleased with the behaviour of any person towards you, but because it is for your good, is wise in itself, and the effect of his love and goodness towards you ; so when you are satisfied, that God does not only do that, which is wise, and good, and kind, but that, which is the effect of an infinite wisdom and love in the care of you ; it will be as necessary, whilst you have this faith, to be

thankful and pleased with every thing, which God chooses for you, as to wish your own happiness.

Whenever therefore you find yourself disposed to uneasiness, or murmuring at any thing, which is the effect of God's providence over you, you must look upon yourself as denying either the wisdom or goodness of God. For every complaint necessarily supposes this. You would never complain of your neighbour, but that you suppose, you can show either his unwise, unjust, or unkind behaviour towards you.

Every murmuring, impatient reflection under the providence of God is the same accusation of God. A complaint always supposes ill usage. Hence also you may see the great necessity and piety of this thankful state of heart ; because the want of it implies an accusation of God's want either of wisdom or goodness in his disposal of us. It is not therefore any high degree of perfection, founded in any uncommon nicety of thinking, or refined notions, but a plain principle, founded on this plain belief, that God is a being of infinite wisdom and goodness.

This resignation to the divine will may be considered in two respects ; first, as it signifies a thankful approbation of God's general provi-

dence over the world ; secondly, as it signifies a thankful acceptance of his particular providence over us.

First. Every man is by the law of his creation, by the first article of his creed, obliged to consent to, and acknowledge the wisdom and goodness of God, in his general providence over the whole world. He is to believe, that it is the effect of God's great wisdom and goodness, that the world itself was formed at such a particular time, and in such a manner ; that the general order of nature, the whole frame of things, is contrived and formed in the best manner. He is to believe, that God's providence over states and kingdoms, times and seasons, is all for the best ; that the revolutions of state, and changes of empire, the rise and fall of monarchies, persecutions, wars, famine, and plagues, are all permitted, and conducted by God's providence, to the general good of man in this state of trial.

A good man is to believe all this, with the same fulness of assent, as he believes, that God is in every place, though he neither sees, nor can comprehend the manner of his presence.

This is a noble magnificence of thought, a true religious greatness of mind, to be thus affected with God's general providence, admiring

and magnifying his wisdom in all things; never murmuring at the course of the world, or the state of things; but looking upon all around, at heaven and earth, as a pleased spectator; and adoring that invisible hand, which gives laws to all motions, and overrules all events to ends suitable to the highest wisdom and goodness.

It is very common for people to allow themselves great liberty in finding fault with such things, as have God only for their cause.

Every one thinks, he may justly say, what a wretched, abominable climate he lives in. This man is frequently telling you, what a dismal, cursed day it is, and what intolerable seasons we have. Another thinks, he has very little to thank God for, that it is hardly worth his while to live in a world so full of changes and revolutions. But these are tempers of great impiety, and show, that religion has not yet its seat in the heart of those, who have them.

It sounds indeed much better to murmur at the course of the world, or the state of things, than to murmur at providence; to complain of the seasons and weather, than to complain of God; but if these have no other cause but God and his providence, it is a poor distinction to

say, that you are angry only at the things, but not at the cause and director of them.

How sacred the whole frame of the world is, how all things are to be considered as God's, and referred to him, is fully taught by our blessed lord in the case of oaths. ‘ But I say unto you, swear not at all ; neither by heaven, for it is God's throne ; nor by the earth, for it is his footstool ; neither by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great king ; neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black ;’ that is, because the whiteness or blackness of thy hair is not thine, but God's.

Here you see all things in the whole order of nature, from the highest heavens to the smallest hair, are always to be considered, not separately as they are in themselves, but as in some relation to God. If this be good reasoning, thou shalt not swear by the earth, a city, or thy hair, because these things are God's, and in a certain manner belong to him ; is it not exactly the same reasoning to say, thou shalt not murmur at the seasons of the earth, the states of cities, and the change of times, because all these things are in the hands of God, have him for their author, are directed and governed by him to such ends, as are most suitable to his wise providence ?

If you think, you can murmur at the state of things without murmuring at providence, or complain of seasons without complaining of God ; hear what our blessed lord says further upon oaths. ‘ Whoso shall swear by the altar, sweareth by it, and by all things thereon ; and whoso shall swear by the temple, sweareth by him, that dwelleth therein ; and he, that shall swear by heaven, sweareth by the throne of God, and by him, that sitteth thereon.’

Does not this scripture plainly oblige us to reason after this manner ? Whoso murmurs at the course of the world, murmurs at God, that governs the course of the world. Whoso repines at seasons and weather, and speaks impatiently of times and events, repines and speaks impatiently of God, who is the sole lord and governour of times, seasons, and events.

As therefore when we think of God himself, we are to have no sentiments but of praise and thanksgiving ; so when we look at those things, which are under the direction of God, and governed by his providence we are to receive them with the same tempers of praise and gratitude.

Though we are not to think all things right, and just, and lawful, which the providence of God permits ; for then nothing could be un-

just, because nothing is without his permission ; yet we must adore God in the greatest publick calamities, the most grievous persecutions, as things, which are suffered by God, like plagues and famines, for ends suitable to his wisdom and glory in the government of the world.

There is nothing more suitable to the piety of a reasonable creature, or the spirit of a christian, than thus to approve, admire, and glorify God in all the acts of his general providence ; considering the whole world as his particular family, and all events as directed by his wisdom.

Every one seems to consent to this, as an undeniable truth, that all things must be, as God pleases ; and is not this enough to make every man pleased with them himself ? How can a man be a peevish complainer of any thing, which is the effect of providence, but by showing, that his own selfish will and wisdom are of more weight with him, than the will and wisdom of God ? What can religion be said to have done for a man, whose heart is in this state ?

For if a man cannot thank and praise God, as well in calamities and sufferings, as in prosperity and happiness, he is so far from the piety of a christian, as he, who only loves them, that love him, is from the charity of a christian.

For to thank God only for such things, as you like, is no more a proper act of piety, than to believe only what you see is an act of faith.

Resignation and thanksgiving to God are only acts of piety, when they are acts of faith, trust, and confidence in the divine goodness.

The faith of Abraham was an act of true piety ; because it stopped at no difficulties, was not altered nor lessened by any human appearances. It first of all carried him, against all show of happiness, from his own kindred and country into a strange land, ‘not knowing whither he went.’ It afterwards made him against all appearances of nature, when his ‘body was dead, when he was about an hundred years old,’ depend upon the promise of God, ‘being fully persuaded, that what God had promised, he was able to perform.’ It was this same faith, which against so many pleas of nature, so many appearances of reason, prevailed upon him to offer up Isaac, ‘accounting, that God was able to raise him up from the dead.’

This faith is the true pattern of christian resignation to the divine pleasure. You are to thank and praise God, not only for things agreeable to you, which have the appearance of happiness and comfort ; but when you are, like A-

braham, called from all appearances of comfort, to be a pilgrim in a strange land, to part with an only son ; being as fully persuaded of the divine goodness in all things, which happen to you, as Abraham was of the divine promise, when there was the least appearance of its being performed.

This is the true christian resignation to God, which requires no more to the support of it, than such a plain assurance of the goodness of God, as Abraham had of his veracity. If you ask yourself, what greater reason Abraham had to depend upon the divine veracity, than you have to depend upon the divine goodness, you will find, that none can be given.

You cannot therefore look upon this as an unnecessary, high pitch of perfection, since the want of it implies the want not of any high notions, but of a plain and ordinary faith in the most certain doctrines both of natural and revealed religion.

Thus much concerning resignation to the divine will, as it signifies a thankful approbation of God's general providence. It is now to be considered, as it signifies a thankful acceptance of God's particular providence over us.

Every man is to consider himself as a particular object of God's providence ; under the

same care and protection of God, as if the world had been made for him alone. It is not by chance, that any man is born at such a time, of such parents, and in such place and condition. It is as certain, that every soul comes into the body at such a time, and in such circumstances, by the express designation of God, according to some purposes of his will, and for some particular ends ; this is as certain, as that it is by the express designation of God, that some beings are angels, and others are men.

It is as much by the counsel and eternal purpose of God, that you should be born in your particular state, and that Isaac should be the son of Abraham, as that Gabriel should be an angel, and Isaac a man.

The scriptures assure us, that it was by divine appointment, that our blessed saviour was born at Bethlehem, and at such a time. Although it was owing to the dignity of his person, and the great importance of his birth, that thus much of the divine counsel was declared to the world concerning the time and manner of it; yet we are as sure from the same scriptures, that the time and manner of every man's coming into the world, is according to some eternal purposes and directions of divine providence,

and in such time, and place, and circumstances, as are directed and governed by God for particular ends of his wisdom and goodness.

This we are as certain of from plain revelation, as we can be of any thing. For if we are told, that 'not a sparrow falleth to the ground without our heavenly father ;' can any thing more strongly teach us, that much greater beings, such as human souls, come not into the world without the care and direction of our heavenly father ? If it be said, 'the very hairs of your head are all numbered' ; is it not to teach us, that nothing, not the smallest things imaginable, happen to us by chance ? But if the smallest things, we can conceive, are declared to be under the divine direction, need we, or can we be more plainly taught, that the greatest things of life, such as the manner of our coming into the world, our parents, the time, and other circumstances of our birth and condition, are all according to the eternal purposes, direction, and appointment of divine providence ?

When the disciples put this question to our blessed lord concerning the blind man, saying, 'Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind ?' He, that was the eter-

nial wisdom of God, made this answer, ‘ Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents ; but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.’ Plainly declaring, that the particular circumstances of every man’s birth, the body, which he receives, and the condition and state of life, into which he is born, are appointed by a secret providence, which directs all things to their particular times and seasons, and manner of existence, that the wisdom and works of God may be made manifest in them all.

As therefore it is thus certain, that we are, what we are, as to birth, time, and condition of entering into the world ; since all, which is particular in our state, is the effect of God’s particular providence over us, and intended for some particular ends both of his glory and our own happiness ; we are by the greatest obligations of gratitude called upon to conform and resign our will to the will of God in all these respects ; thankfully approving and accepting every thing, which is particular in our state ; praising and glorifying his name for our birth of such parents, and in such circumstances of state and condition ; being fully assured, that it was for some reasons of infinite wisdom and goodness,

that we were so born into such particular states of life.

If the man above-mentioned was born blind, that the ‘works of God might be manifested in him,’ had he not greater reason to praise God for appointing him in such a particular manner, to be the instrument of his glory ? If one person is born here, and another there ; if one falls amongst riches, and another into poverty ; if one receives his flesh and blood from these parents, and another from those, for as particular ends, as the man was born blind ; have not all people the greatest reason to bless God, and to be thankful for their particular state and condition, because all, that is particular in it, is as directly intended for the glory of God, and their own good, as the particular blindness of that man, who was so born, that ‘the works of God might be manifested in him’ ?

How noble an idea does this give us of the divine omniscience presiding over the whole world, and governing such a long chain and combination of seeming accidents and chances, to the common and particular advantage of all beings ? So that all persons, in such a wonderful variety of causes, accidents and events should all fall into such particular states, as were

foreseen, and fore-ordained to their best advantage, and so as to be most serviceable to the wise and glorious ends of God's government of all the world.

Had you been any thing else, than what you are, you had, all things considered, been less wisely provided for, than you are now : you had wanted some circumstances and conditions, which are best fitted to make you happy yourself, and serviceable to the glory of God.

Could you see all that, which God sees ; all that happy chain of causes and motives, which are to move and invite you to a right course of life, you would see something to make you like that state you are in, as fitter for you than any other.

But as you cannot see this, so it is here, that your christian faith is to exercise itself, and render you as grateful and thankful for the happiness of your state, as if you saw every thing, which contributes to it, with your own eyes.

But, if this be the case of every man in the world, thus blessed with some particular state, which is most convenient for him, how reasonable is it for every man to will that, which God has already willed for him ; and by a pious faith and trust in the divine goodness, thankfully

adore and magnify that wise providence, which he is sure has made the best choice for him of those things, which he could not choose for himself ?

Every uneasiness at our own state is founded upon comparing it with that of other people ; which is full as unreasonable, as if a man in a dropsy should be angry at those, who prescribe different things to him from those, which are prescribed to people in health. For all the different states of life are like different states of diseases ; what is a remedy to one man in his state may be a poison to another. So that to murmur, because you are not, as some others are, is, as if a man in one disease should murmur, that he is not treated like him, that is in another ; whereas, if he were to have his will, he would be killed by that, which would prove the cure of another.

It is just thus in the various conditions of life ; if you give yourself up to uneasiness, or complain at any thing in your state, you may, for ought you know, be so ungrateful to God, as to murmur at that very thing, which is to prove the cause of your salvation.

Had you it in your power to get that, which you think is so grievous to want, it might per-

haps be that very thing, which of all others would most expose you to condemnation.

So that whether we consider the infinite goodness of God, which cannot choose amiss for us, or our own great ignorance of what is most advantageous to us, there can be nothing so reasonable and pious, as to have no will but that of God's, and desire nothing for ourselves, in our person, our state, and condition, but that, which the good providence of God appoints us.

As the good providence of God thus introduces us into the world, into such a state and condition of life, as are most convenient for us, so the same unerring wisdom orders all events and changes in the whole course of our lives in such a manner, as to render them the fittest means to exercise and improve our virtue.

Nothing hurts us, nothing destroys us, but the ill use of that liberty, with which God has intrusted us. We are as sure, that nothing happens to us by chance, as that the world itself was not made by chance. We are as certain, that all things happen, and work together for our good, as that God is goodness itself. So that a man has as much reason to will every thing, which happens to him, because God

wills it, as to think, that is wisest, which is directed by infinite wisdom.

This is not cheating nor soothing ourselves into any false content, or imaginary happiness ; but is a satisfaction grounded upon as great a certainty, as the being and attributes of God. For, if we are right in believing God to act over us with infinite wisdom and goodness, we cannot carry our notions of conformity and resignation to the divine will too high ; nor can we ever be deceived, by thinking that to be the best for us, which God has brought upon us.

The providence of God is not more concerned in the government of night and day, and the variety of seasons, than in the common course of events, which seem most to depend upon the mere wills of men. So that it is as strictly right to look upon all worldly accidents and changes, all the various turns and alterations in your own life, to be as truly the effects of divine providence, as the rising and setting of the sun, or the alterations of the seasons of the year. As you are therefore always to adore the wisdom of God in the direction of these things so it is the same reasonable duty always to magnify God, as an equal director of every thing,

which happens to you in the course of your own life.

This holy resignation and conformity of your will to the will of God, being so much the true state of piety, I hope you will be in the constant habit of applying to God for so great a gift. By thus constantly praying for it, your heart may be habitually disposed towards it, and always in a state of readiness to look at every thing as God's, and to consider him in every thing : that so every thing, which befalls you, may be received in the spirit of piety, and made a mean of exercising some virtue.

There is nothing, which so powerfully governs the heart, which so strongly excites us to wise and reasonable actions, as a true sense of God's presence. But as we cannot see, nor apprehend the essence of God, so nothing will so constantly keep us under a lively sense of the presence of God, as this holy resignation, which attributes every thing to him, and receives every thing as from him.

Could we see a miracle from God, how would our thought be affected with an holy awe and veneration of his presence ! But if we consider every thing as God's doing, either by order or

permission, we shall then be affected with common things, as they would be, who saw a miracle.

For as there is nothing to affect you in a miracle, but as it is the action of God, and bespeaks his presence ; so when you consider God, as acting in all things, and all events, then all things will become venerable to you, like miracles, and fill you with the same awful sentiments of the divine presence.

You must not reserve the exercise of this pious temper to any particular times or occasions, or fancy, how resigned you will be to God, if such or such trials should happen. For this is amusing yourself with the notion or idea of resignation instead of the virtue itself.

Do not therefore please yourself with thinking, how piously you would act and submit to God in a plague, a famine, or persecution ; but be intent upon the perfection of the present day ; and be assured, that the best way of showing a true zeal is to make little things the occasion of greater piety.

Begin therefore in the smallest matters, and most ordinary occasions, and accustom your mind to the daily exercise of this pious temper in the lowest occurrences of life. When a contempt, an affront, a little injury, loss, or disap-

pointment, or the smallest events of every day, continually raise your mind to God in proper acts of resignation, then you may justly hope, that you shall be numbered amongst those, who are resigned and thankful to God in the greatest trials and afflictions.

CHAP. XVIII.

Recommending self-examination and a particular confession of sins at the time of evening prayer.

THE evening is a time so proper for devotion, that I suppose nothing needs be said to recommend it, as a season of prayer, to all people, who profess any regard to piety.

As the labour and action of every state of life are generally over at this hour, so this is the proper time for every one to call himself to an account, and review all his behaviour from the first action of the day. The necessity of this examination is founded upon the necessity of repentance. For if it be necessary to repent of all our sins, if the guilt of unrepented sins still continue upon us, then it is necessary, that not only all our sins, but the particular circumstan-

ces and aggravations of them be known and recollected, and brought to repentance.

The scripture says, ‘ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.’ Which is as much as to say, that then only our sins are forgiven, and we cleansed from the guilt and unrighteousness of them, when they are thus confessed and repented of.

There seems therefore to be the greatest necessity, that all our daily actions be constantly observed, and brought to account, lest by negligence we load ourselves with the guilt of unrepented sins.

This examination therefore of ourselves every evening is not only to be considered as a commendable rule, and fit for a wise man to observe ; but as something, which is as necessary, as a daily confession of our sins ; because this daily repentance is of very little signification, and loses all its chief benefit, unless it be a particular confession and repentance of the sins of that day. This examination is necessary to repentance in the same manner, as time is necessary. You cannot repent nor express your sorrow, unless you allow some time for it ; nor can you repent, but so far, as you know, what it is, which you

are repenting of. So that when it is said, that it is necessary to examine and call your actions to account; it is only saying, that it is necessary to know what, and how many things you are to repent of.

You perhaps have hitherto only used yourself to confess yourself a sinner in general, and ask forgiveness in the gross, without any particular remembrance or contrition for the particular sins of that day. By this practice you are brought to believe, that the same short, general form of confession of sin in general is a sufficient repentance for every day.

Suppose, another person should hold, that a confession of our sins in general once at the end of every week was sufficient; and that it was as well to confess the sins of seven days all together, as to have a particular repentance at the end of every day.

I know, you sufficiently see the unreasonableness and impiety of this opinion, and that you think it easy enough to show the danger and folly of it. Yet you cannot bring one argument against such an opinion; but what will be as good an argument against such a daily repentance, as does not call the particular sins of that day to a strict account.

As you can bring no express text of scripture against such an opinion, but must take all your arguments from the nature of repentance, and the necessity of a particular repentance for particular sins ; so every argument of that kind must as fully prove the necessity of being very particular in our repentance of the sins of every day. Since nothing can be justly said against leaving the sins of the whole week to be repented for in the gross, but what may as justly be said against a daily repentance, which considers the sins of that day only in the gross.

Would you tell such a man, that a daily confession was necessary to keep up an abhorrence of sin, that the mind would grow hardened and senseless of the guilt of sin without it ? And is not this as good a reason for requiring, that your daily repentance be very express and particular for your daily sins ? For if confession is to raise an abhorrence of sin, surely that confession, which considers and lays open your particular sins, which brings them to light with all their circumstances and aggravations, which requires a particular sorrowful acknowledgment of every sin, must, in a much greater degree, fill the mind with an abhorrence of sin, than that, which only in one and the same form of

words confesses you only to be a sinner in general. For as this is nothing, but what the greatest saint may justly say of himself, so the daily repeating of only such a confession has nothing in it to make you truly ashamed of your own way of life.

Again ; must you not tell such a man, that, by leaving himself to such a weekly, general confession, he would be in great danger of forgetting a great many of his sins ? But is there any sense or force in this argument, unless you suppose that our sins are all to be remembered and brought to a particular repentance ? Is it not as necessary, that our particular sins be not forgotten, but particularly remembered in our daily, as in a repentance at any other time ? So that every argument for a daily confession and repentance is the same argument for the confession and repentance of the particular sins of every day. Because daily confession has no other reason or necessity but our daily sins ; and therefore is nothing of what it should be, but so far as it is repentance and sorrowful acknowledgment of the sins of the day.

You would, I suppose, think yourself chargeable with great impiety, if you were to go to bed without confessing yourself to be a sinner.

and asking pardon of God ; you would not think it sufficient, that you did so yesterday. And yet, if without any regard to the present day, you only repeat the same form of words, which you used yesterday, the sins of the present may justly be looked upon to have had no repentance. If the sins of the present day require a new confession, it must be such a new confession as is proper to itself. For it is the state and condition of every day, which are to determine the state and manner of your repentance in the evening ; otherwise the same general form of words is rather an empty formality, which has the appearance of a duty, than such a true performance of it, as is necessary to make it truly useful to you.

Let it be supposed, that on a certain day you have been guilty of these sins ; that you have told a vain lie, ascribing something falsely to yourself through pride ; that you have been guilty of detraction, and indulged yourself in some degree of intemperance. Let it be supposed, that on the next day you have lived in a contrary manner ; that you have neglected no duty of devotion, and been the rest of the day innocently employed in your proper business.

Let it be supposed, that on the evening of both these days you only use the same confession in general, considering it rather as a duty, which is to be performed every night, than as a repentance, which is to be suited to the particular state of the day.

Can it with any reason be said, that each day has had its proper repentance ? Is it not as good sense to say, there is no difference in the guilt of these days, as to say, that there needs be no different repentance at the end of them ? Or how can each of them have its proper repentance, but by its having a repentance as large, and extensive, and particular, as the guilt of each day ?

Let it be also supposed, that in that day, when you have been guilty of the three notorious sins above-mentioned, in your evening repentance you had only called one of them to mind ; is it not plain, that the other two are unrepented of, and that therefore their guilt still abides upon them ? So that you are then in the state of him, who commits himself to the night without the repentance for such a day, as had betrayed him into two such great sins.

These are not needless particulars, nor such scrupulous niceties, as a man needs not trouble

himself about ; but are such plain truths, as essentially concern the very life of piety. For if repentance be necessary, it is full as necessary, that it be rightly performed, and in due manner. I have entered into all these particulars, only to show you in the plainest manner, that examination, and a careful review of all the actions of the day, is not only to be looked upon as a good rule, but as something as necessary as repentance itself.

If a man is to account for his expenses at night, can it be thought a needless exactness in him, to take notice of every particular expense in the day ?

If a man is to repent of his sins at night, can it be thought too great a piece of scrupulosity in him to know and call to mind, what sins he is to repent of ?

Though it should be granted, that a confession in general may be a sufficient repentance for the end of such days, as have only the unavoidable frailties of our nature to lament ; yet even this fully proves the absolute necessity of this self-examination ; for without this examination, who can know, that he has gone through any day in this manner ?

An evening repentance, which thus brings all the actions of the day to account, is not only necessary to wipe off the guilt of sin, but is also the most certain way to amend and perfect our lives.

For it is only such a repentance as this, which touches the heart, awakens the conscience, and leaves a horrour and detestation of sin upon the mind. For instance, if it should happen, that, upon any particular evening, all, with which you could charge yourself, should be this ; namely, a hasty, negligent performance of your devotions, or too much time spent in impertinent conversation ; if the unreasonableness of these things were fully reflected upon, and acknowledged ; if you were then to condemn yourself before God for them, and implore his pardon and assisting grace, what could be so likely a mean to prevent your falling into the same faults the next day ?

Or if you should fall into them again the next day ; yet if they were again brought to the same examination and condemnation in the presence of God, their happening again would be such a proof to you of your own folly and weakness, would cause such a pain and remorse in your mind, and fill you with such shame and

confusion at yourself, as would, in all probability, make you exceedingly desirous of greater perfection.

In the case of repeated sins, this would be the certain benefit, which we should receive from this examination and confession ; the mind would thereby be made humble, full of sorrow and deep compunction, and by degrees forced into amendment.

Whereas a formal, general confession, which is only considered as an evening duty, which overlooks the particular mistakes of the day, and is the same, whether the day be spent ill or well, has little or no effect upon the mind ; a man may use such a daily confession, and yet go on sinning and confessing all his life, without any remorse of mind, or true desire of amendment.

For if your own particular sins are left out of your confession, your confessing of sin in general has no more effect upon your mind, than if you had only confessed, that all men in general are sinners. There is nothing in any confession to show, that it is yours, but so far as it is a self-accusation, not of sin in general, or such as is common to all others, but of such partic-

lum puncle dene other way his buss. Juncle wren.

ular sins, as are your own proper shame and reproach.

No other confession, but such as thus discovers and accuses your own particular guilt, can be an act of true sorrow or real concern at your own condition. A confession, which is without this sorrow and compunction of heart, has nothing in it, either to atone for past sins, or to produce in us any true reformation and amendment of life.

In order to make this examination still further beneficial, every man should oblige himself to a certain method in it. As every man has something particular in his nature, stronger inclinations to some vices than others, some infirmities, which stick closer to him, and are harder to be conquered, than others ; and as it is as easy for every man to know this of himself, as to know, whom he likes, or dislikes ; so it is highly necessary, that these particularities of our natures and tempers should never escape a severe trial at our evening repentance ; I say, a severe trial, because nothing but a rigorous severity against these natural tempers is sufficient to conquer them.

They are the right eyes, which are not to be spared ; but to be plucked out, and cast from us. For as they are the infirmities of nature,

so they have the strength of nature, and must be treated with great opposition, or they will soon be too strong for us.

He therefore, who knows himself most of all subject to anger and passion, must be very exact and constant in his examination of this temper every evening. He must find out every slip, that he has made of that kind, whether in thought, or word, or action ; he must shame, and reproach, and accuse himself before God, for every thing, which he has said or done in obedience to his passion. He must no more allow himself to forget the examination of this temper, than to forget his whole prayers.

If you find, that vanity is your prevailing temper, which is always putting you upon the adornment of your person, and catching after every thing, that compliments or flatters your abilities, never spare nor forget this temper in your evening examination ; but confess to God every vanity of thought, or word, or action, which you have been guilty of, and put yourself to all the shame and confusion for it, which you can.

In this manner should all people act with regard to their chief frailty, to which their nature most inclines them. Though it should not

immediately do all, which they could wish, yet, by a constant practice, it would certainly, in a short time, produce its desired effect.

As, also, all states and employments of life have their particular dangers and temptations, and expose people more to some sins, than others, so every man, that wishes his own improvement, should make it a necessary part of his evening examination, to consider, how he has avoided or committed such sins, as are most common to his state of life.

For as our business and condition of life have great power over us, so nothing but such watchfulness as this can secure us from those temptations, to which they daily expose us.

The poor man is always in danger of repining and uneasiness. The rich man is most exposed to sensuality and indulgence; the tradesman to lying and unreasonable gains; the scholar to pride and vanity. So that in every state of life, a man should always, in the examination of himself, have a strict eye upon those faults, to which his state of life most of all exposes him.

As it is, moreover, reasonable to suppose, that every good man has proposed to himself some method of holy living, and set himself some rules to be observed; so it should be a

constant part of his night recollection, to examine how, and in what degree he has observed them, and to reproach himself before God for every neglect.

By rules, I here mean such rules, as relate to the well-ordering of our time, and the business of our common life ; such rules, as prescribe a certain order to all, which we are to do, our business, devotion, mortifications, readings, retirements, conversation, meals, refreshments, sleep, and the like.

Now as good rules, relating to all these things, are certain means of great improvement, and such as all serious christians must needs propose to themselves, so they will hardly ever be observed to any purpose, unless they are made the constant subject of our evening examination.

Lastly, you are not to content yourself with a hasty general review of the day, but you must enter upon it with deliberation, and let no time, place, nor action be overlooked.

An examination thus managed promises to be attended with beneficial effects. It will serve, by a divine blessing, to give you a just knowledge of yourself, and to perfect you in the exercises and habits of virtue and holiness.

Thus much concerning the evening examination.

I now proceed to lay before you such considerations, as may fill your mind with a just dread and horrour of all sin, and help you to confess your own in the most passionate condition and sorrow of heart.

Consider first, how odious all sin is to God, what a mighty baseness it is, and how abominable it renders sinners in the sight of God ; that it is sin alone, which makes the great difference betwixt an angel and the devil ; and that every sinner is, so far as he sins, a friend of the devil's, and carrying on his work against God ; that sin is a greater blemish and defilement of the soul, than any filth or disease is a defilement of the body ; and to be content to live in sin is a much greater baseness, than to desire to wallow in the mire, or love any bodily impurity.

For all sins, whether of sensuality, pride, or falseness, or any other irregular passion, are nothing else but the filth and impure diseases of the rational soul ; and all righteousness is nothing else but the purity, the decency, the beauty, and perfection of that spirit, which is made in the image of God.

Consider next your own particular share in the guilt of sin. If you would know, with what zeal you ought to repent yourself, consider, how you would exhort another sinner to repentance ; and what repentance and amendment you would expect from him, whom you judged to be the greatest sinner in the world.

Now this case every man may justly reckon to be his own ; and you may fairly look upon yourself to be the greatest sinner, that you know in the world.

For, though you may know abundance of people to be guilty of some gross sins, with which you cannot charge yourself ; yet you may justly condemn yourself, as the greatest sinner that you know ; for these following reasons.

First. Because you know more of the folly of your own heart, than you do of other people's ; and can charge yourself with various sins, that you know of yourself only, and cannot be sure that other sinners are guilty of them. So that as you know more of the folly, the baseness, the pride, the deceitfulness, and negligence of your own heart, than you do of any one's else, so you have just reason to consider yourself as the greatest sinner, that you know.

Secondly. The greatness of our guilt arises chiefly from the greatness of God's goodness towards us, from the particular graces and blessings, the favours, the lights, and instructions, which we have received from him.

As these graces and blessings, and the multitude of God's favours towards us, are the great aggravations of our sins against God, so they are known to ourselves only. Therefore every sinner knows more of the aggravations of his own guilt, than he does of other people's ; and consequently may justly look upon himself to be the greatest sinner, that he knows.

How good God has been to other sinners ; what light and instruction he has vouchsafed them ; what blessings and graces they have received from him ; how often he has touched their hearts with holy inspirations, you cannot tell. But all this you know of yourself ; therefore you know greater aggravations of your own guilt, and are able to charge yourself with greater ingratitude, than you can charge upon other people.

This is the reason, why the greatest saints have in all ages condemned themselves as the greatest sinners ; because they knew some ag-

gravations of their own sins, which they could not know of other people's.

The right way therefore to fill your heart with true contrition, and a deep sense of your own sins, is this ; you are not to consider, nor compare the outward form, or course of your life, with that of other people's, and then think yourself to be less sinful than they, because the outward course of your life is less sinful than theirs.

But in order to know your own guilt, you must consider your own particular circumstances, your health, your sickness, your youth, or age, your particular calling, the happiness of your education, the degrees of light and instruction, which you have received ; the good men, that you have conversed with ; the admonitions, which you have had ; the good books, which you have read ; the numberless multitude of divine blessings, graces, and favours, which you have received ; the good motions of grace, which you have resisted ; the resolutions of amendment, which you have often broken ; and the checks of conscience, which you have disregarded.

It is from these circumstances, that every one is to state the measure and greatness of his own guilt. As you know only the circumstances of your own sins, so you must necessarily know,

how to charge yourself with higher degrees of guilt, than you can charge upon other people.

God almighty knows greater sinners, it may be, than you are ; because he sees and knows the circumstances of all men's sins. But your own heart, if it is faithful to you, can discover no guilt so great as your own ; because it can only see in you those circumstances, on which great part of the guilt of sin is founded.

You may see sins in other people, which you cannot charge upon yourself ; but then you know a number of circumstances of your own guilt, which you cannot lay to their charge.

Perhaps that person, who appears at such a distance from your virtue, and so odious in your eyes, would have been much better, than you are, had he been altogether in your circumstances, and received the same favours and graces from God, which you have.

This is a very humbling reflection, and very proper for those people to make, who measure their virtue, by comparing the outward course of their lives with that of other people's.

For look at whom you will, however different from you in his way of life, yet you can never know, that he has resisted so much divine grace as you have, or that in all your circumstances,

he would not have been much truer to his duty, than you are.

This is the reason, why I desired you to consider, how you would exhort that man to confess and bewail his sins, whom you looked upon to be one of the greatest sinners.

Because if you will deal justly, you must fix the charge at home, and look no further than yourself. For God has given no one any power of knowing the true greatness of any sins, but his own; and therefore the greatest sinner, that every one knows, is himself.

You may easily see, how such a one in the outward course of his life breaks the laws of God; but then you can never say, that, had you been exactly in all his circumstances, you would not have broken them more, than he has done.

A serious and frequent reflection upon these things will mightily tend to humble us in our own eyes, make us very apprehensive of the greatness of our own guilt, and very tender in censuring and condemning other people.

Who would dare to be severe against other people, when, for ought he can tell, the severity of God may be more due to him, than to them? Who would exclaim against the guilt of others,

when he considers, that he knows more of the greatness of his own guilt, than he does of theirs ?

How often you have resisted God's holy spirit ; how many motives to goodness you have disregarded ; how many particular blessings you have sinned against ; how many good resolutions you have broken ; how many checks and admonitions of conscience you have stifled, you very well know. But how often this has been the case of other sinners, you know not. And therefore the greatest sinner, that you know, must be yourself.

Whenever therefore you are angry at sin or sinners ; whenever you read or think of God's indignation and wrath at wicked men, let this teach you to be the most severe in your censure, and most humble and contrite in the acknowledgment and confession of your own sins ; because you know of no sinner equal to yourself.

Lastly, to conclude this chapter. Having thus examined and confessed your sins, be importunate in your entreaties at the throne of divine grace to prepare you for death.

In your prayers on this solemn subject, reckon up all the dangers, uneasinesses, and terrors of

death ; let them contain every thing, which can affect and awaken your mind into just apprehensions of it. Let your petitions be all for right sentiments of the approach and importance of death ; and beg of God, that your mind may be possessed with such a sense of its nearness, that you may have it always in your thoughts, do every thing as in sight of it, and make every day a day of preparation for it.

Represent to your imagination, that your bed is your grave ; that all things are ready for your interment ; that you are to have no more to do with this world ; and that it will be owing to God's great mercy, if you ever see the light of the sun again, or have another day to add to your works of piety.

Then commit yourself to sleep, as into the hands of God ; as one, who is to have no more opportunities of doing good ; but is to awake amongst spirits, that are separate from the body, and waiting for the judgment of the last great day.

Such a solemn resignation of yourself into the hands of God every evening, and parting with all the world, as if you were never to see it any more, and all this in the silence and dark-

ness of the night, is a practice, that will soon have excellent effects upon your spirit.

For this time of the night is exceeding proper for such prayers and meditations ; and the likeness, which sleep and darkness have to death, will contribute very much to make your thoughts about it the more deep and affecting. So that I hope, you will not let a time, so proper for such prayers, be ever passed over without them.

CHAP. XIX.

The conclusion. On the excellency of a devout spirit.

I HAVE thus explained the nature of devotion, both as it signifies a life devoted to God, and as it signifies the habitual performance of prayer. I have now only to add a word or two in recommendation of a life governed by this spirit of devotion.

For, though it is as reasonable to suppose it the desire of all christians to arrive at christian perfection, as to suppose, that all sick men desire to be restored to perfect health ; yet ex-

perience shows us, that nothing wants more to be pressed, repeated, and forced upon our minds, than the plainest rules of christianity.

But the thing, which is here pressed upon all, is a life of a great and strict devotion ; which, I think, has been sufficiently shown to be equally the duty and happiness of all orders of men. Neither is there any thing in any particular state of life, that can be justly pleaded as a reason for any abatements of a devout spirit.

But because in this polite age of ours, we have so lived away the spirit of devotion, that many seem afraid even to be suspected of it, imagining great devotion to be great bigotry ; that it is founded in ignorance and poorness of spirit, and that little, weak, and dejected minds are generally the greatest proficients in it ; it shall here be fully shown, that great devotion is the noblest temper of the greatest and noblest souls ; and that they, who think, it receives any advantage from ignorance and poorness of spirit, are themselves not a little, but entirely ignorant of the nature of devotion, the nature of God, and the nature of themselves. People of fine parts and learning, or of great knowledge in worldly matters, may perhaps

think it hard to have their want of devotion charged upon their ignorance. But if they will be content to be tried by reason and scripture, it may soon be made to appear, that a want of devotion, wherever it is, either amongst the learned or unlearned, is founded in gross ignorance, and the greatest blindness and insensibility, which can happen to a rational creature.

So far is devotion from being the effect of a little and dejected mind, that it must and will be always highest in the most perfect natures.

For, first, who reckons it a sign of a poor and little mind, for a man to be full of reverence and duty to his parents, to have the truest love and honour for his friend, or to excel in the highest instances of gratitude to his benefactor ?

Are not these tempers, in the highest degree, in the most exalted and perfect minds ? And yet, what is high devotion, but the highest exercise of these tempers of duty, reverence, love, honour, and gratitude to the amiable, glorious parent, friend, and benefactor of all mankind ?

Is it a true greatness of mind to reverence the authority of your parents, to fear the displeasure of your friend, to dread the reproaches

of your benefactor ? and must not this fear, and dread, and reverence, be much more just, and reasonable, and honourable, when they are in the highest degree towards God ?

As the higher these tempers are, the more are they esteemed amongst men, and are allowed to be so much the greater proofs of a true greatness of mind ; so the higher and greater these same tempers are towards God, so much the more do they prove the nobility, excellence, and greatness of the mind.

If a prince, out of his mere goodness, should send you a pardon by one of his slaves, would you think it a part of your duty to receive the slave with marks of love, esteem, and gratitude for his great kindness in bringing you so great a gift ; and at the same time think it a meanness and poorness of spirit, to show love, esteem, and gratitude to the prince, who of his own goodness freely sent you the pardon ? Yet this would be as reasonable, as to suppose, that love, esteem, honour, and gratitude are noble tempers, and instances of a great soul, when they are paid to our fellow-creatures ; but the effects of a poor, ignorant, dejected mind, when they are paid to God.

That part of devotion, which expresses itself in sorrowful confessions, and penitential tears of a broken and a contrite heart, is very far from being any sign of a little and ignorant mind.

For who does not acknowledge it an instance of an ingenuous, generous, and brave mind, to acknowledge a fault, and ask pardon for any offence ! And are not the finest and most improved minds the most remarkable for this excellent temper ?

Is it not also allowed, that the ingenuity and excellence of a man's spirit is much shown, when his sorrow and indignation at himself rise in proportion to the folly of his crime, and the goodness and greatness of the person he has offended ?

Now if things are thus, then the greater any man's mind is, the more he knows of God and himself, the more will he be disposed to prostrate himself before God in all the humblest acts and expressions of repentance.

The greater the ingenuity, the generosity, judgment, and penetration of his mind are, the more will he exercise and indulge a passionate, tender sense of God's just displeasure ; and the more he knows of the greatness, the

goodness, and perfection of the divine nature, the fuller of shame and confusion will he be at his own sins and ingratitude.

On the other hand, the more dull and ignorant any soul is, the more base and ungenerous it naturally is, the more senseless it is of the goodness and purity of God ; so much the more averse will it be to all acts of humble confession and repentance.

From what has been observed, it appears, that devotion is so far from being suited to little ignorant minds, as it is sometimes pretended, that it really constitutes the greatest dignity of our natures.

It is also evident, that indevotion is founded in the worst species of ignorance.

For, first, our blessed lord and his apostles were eminent instances of great and frequent devotion. Now if we will grant, as all christians must grant, that their great devotion was founded in a true knowledge of the nature of devotion, the nature of God, and the nature of man ; then it is plain, that all those, who are insensible of the duty of devotion, are in this excessive state of ignorance, they neither know God, nor themselves, nor devotion.

For if a right knowledge in these three respects produce great devotion, as in the case of our saviour and his apostles, then a neglect of devotion must be chargeable upon ignorance.

How comes it, that most people have recourse to devotion, when they are in sickness, distress, or fear of death ? Is it not, because this state shows more of the want of God, and their own weakness, than they perceive at other times ? Is it not, because their infirmities, their approaching end, convince them of something, which they did not half perceive before ?

If devotion at these seasons be the effect of a better knowledge of God, and ourselves, then the neglect of devotion at other times is always owing to great ignorance of God and ourselves.

As indevotion is ignorance, so it is the most shameful ignorance, and such as is to be charged with the greatest folly.

This will fully appear to any one, who considers, by what rules we are to judge of the excellency of any knowledge, or the shamefulness of any ignorance.

Knowledge itself would be no excellence, nor ignorance any reproach to us, but that we are rational creatures.

But if this be true, then it follows plainly, that that knowledge, which is most suitable to our rational nature, and which most concerns us, as such, to know, is our highest, finest knowledge ; and that ignorance, which relates to things, which are most essential to us, as rational creatures, and which we are most concerned to know, is of all others, the most gross and shameful ignorance.

If therefore there be any things, which concern us more than others, if there be any truths, which are more to us than all others, he, who has the fullest knowledge of these things, who sees these truths in the clearest, strongest light, has, of all others, as a rational creature, the clearest understanding, and the strongest parts.

If therefore our relation to God be our greatest relation, if our advancement in his favour be our highest advancement, he, who has the highest notions of the excellence of this relation, he, who most strongly perceives the highest worth, and great value of holiness and virtue, who judges every thing little, when compared with it, proves himself to be master of the best and most excellent knowledge.

As certain therefore as piety, virtue, and eternal happiness are of the most concern to

man, as certain as the immortality of our nature and relation to God are the most glorious circumstances of our nature, so certain is it, that he, who dwells most in contemplation of them, whose heart is most affected with them, who best comprehends the value and excellency of them, who judges all worldly attainments to be mere bubbles and shadows, in comparison of them, proves himself to have, of all others, the finest understanding and the strongest judgment.

Devotion therefore is the greatest sign of a great and noble genius ; it supposes a soul in its highest state of knowledge ; and none, but little and blinded minds, who are sunk into ignorance and vanity, are destitute of it.

If a human spirit should imagine some mighty prince to be greater than God, we should take it for a poor, ignorant creature ; all people would acknowledge such an imagination to be the height of stupidity.

But if this same human spirit should think it better to be devoted to some mighty prince, than to be devoted to God, would not this be a still greater proof of a poor, ignorant, and blinded nature ?

Yet this is what all people do, who think any thing better, greater, or wiser, than a devout life.

So that, which way soever we consider this matter, it plainly appears, that devotion is an instance of great judgment, of an elevated nature; and the want of devotion is a certain proof of the want of understanding.

The greatest spirits of the heathen world, such as Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato, Epictetus, Marcus Antoninus, &c. owed all their greatness to the spirit of devotion.

They were full of God. Their wisdom and deep contemplations tended only to deliver men from the vanity of the world, the slavery of bodily passions, that they might act as spirits, which came from God, and were soon to return to him.

To see the dignity and greatness of a devout spirit, we need only compare it with other tempers, which are chosen in the room of it.

St. John tells us, 'that all in the world,' that is, all the tempers of a worldly life, 'is the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.'

Let us therefore consider, what wisdom or excellency of mind is required to qualify a man for these delights.

Let us suppose a man given up to the pleasures of the body. Surely this can be no sign of a fine mind, or an excellent spirit ; for if he have but the temper of an animal, he is great enough for these enjoyments.

Let us suppose him to be devoted to honours and splendours, to be fond of glitter and equipage. If this temper required any great parts or fine understanding to make a man capable of it, it would prove the world to abound with great wits.

Let us suppose him to be in love with riches, and to be so eager in the pursuit of them, as never to think, he has enough. This passion is so far from supposing any excellent sense, or great understanding, that blindness and folly are the best supports, which it has.

Let us, lastly, suppose him in another light, not singly devoted to any of these passions, but, as it mostly happens, governed by all of them in their turns. Does this show a more exalted nature, than to spend his days in the service of any one of them ?

For to have a taste for these things, and to be devoted to them, is so far from arguing any tolerable parts or understanding, that they are suited to the dullest, weakest minds, and re-

quire only a great deal of pride and folly to be greatly admired.

Let libertines bring any such charge as this, if they can, against devotion. They may as well endeavour to charge light with every thing, which belongs to darkness.

Let them but grant, that there is a God and providence, and then they have granted enough to justify the wisdom, and support the honour of devotion.

For if there is an infinitely wise and good creator, in whom we live, move, and have our being, whose providence governs all things in all places, surely it must be the highest act of our understanding to conceive rightly of him ; it must be the noblest instance of judgment, the most exalted temper of our nature, to worship and adore this universal providence, to conform to its laws, to study its wisdom, and to live and act every where, as in the presence of this infinitely good and wise creator.

He, who lives thus, lives in the spirit of devotion.

What can show such great parts, and so fine an understanding, as to live in this temper ?

For if God is wisdom, surely he must be the wisest man in the world, who most conforms to

the wisdom of God, who best obeys his providence, who enters furthest into his designs, and does all he can, that God's will may be done on earth, as it is done in heaven.

A devout man makes a true use of his reason. He sees through the vanity of the world, discovers the corruption of his nature, and the blindness of his passions. He lives by a law, which is not visible to vulgar eyes ; he enters into the world of spirits ; he compares the greatest things ; sets eternity against time ; and chooses rather to be for ever great in the presence of God, when he dies, than to have the greatest share of worldly pleasures, whilst he lives.

He, who is devout, is full of these great thoughts ; he lives upon these noble reflections, and conducts himself by rules and principles, which can be apprehended, admired, and loved only by reason.

There is nothing therefore, which shows so great a genius, nothing, which so raises us above vulgar spirits, nothing, which so plainly declares a heroick greatness of mind, as great devotion.

When you suppose a man to be a saint, or all devotion, you have raised him as much above

all other conditions of life, as a philosopher is above an animal.

Lastly. Courage and bravery are words of a great sound, and seem to signify a heroick spirit ; yet humility, which seems to be the lowest, meanest part of devotion, is a more certain argument of a noble and courageous mind.

For humility contends with greater enemies, is more constantly engaged, more violently assaulted, bears more, suffers more, and requires greater courage to support itself, than any instances of worldly bravery.

A man, who dares to be poor and contemptible in the eyes of the world, to approve himself to God ; who resists and rejects all human glory, who opposes the clamour of his passions, who meekly puts up with all injuries and wrongs, and dares stay for his reward, till the invisible hand of God gives to every one his proper place, endures a much greater trial, and exerts a nobler fortitude, than he, who is bold and daring in the fire of battle.

For the boldness of a soldier, if he be a stranger to the spirit of devotion, is rather weakness than fortitude ; it is at best but mad passion, and heated spirits, and has no more true valour

in it, than the fury of a tiger. For as we cannot lift up a hand, nor stir a foot, but by a power, which is lent us from God ; so bold actions, which are not directed by the laws of God, as so many executions of his will, are no more true bravery, than sedate malice is christian patience.

Reason is our universal law, which obliges us in all places, and at all times ; and no actions have any honour, but so far as they are instances of our obedience to reason.

It is as base and cowardly, to be bold and daring against the principle of reason and justice, as to be bold and daring in lying and perjury.

Would we therefore exercise a true fortitude, we must do all in the spirit of devotion, be valiant against the corruptions of the world, and the lusts of the flesh, and the temptations of the devil. For to be daring and courageous against these enemies is the noblest bravery of which a human mind is capable.

I have made this digression for the sake of those, who think great devotion to be bigotry and poorness of spirit ; that by these considerations they may see, how poor and mean all

other tempers are, if compared to it ; that they may see, that all worldly attainments, whether of greatness, wisdom, or bravery, are but empty sounds ; and that there is nothing wise, or great, or noble in a human spirit, but rightly to know and heartily worship and adore the great God, who is the support and life of all spirits, whether in heaven or on earth.